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# A Mother's Sacrifice

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# A MOTHER'S SACRIFICE

## AND OTHER TALES.

BY

A. M. CLARKE.




LONDON:
69 SOUTHWARK BRIDGE ROAD, S.E.;
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## CONTENTS.


| | PAGE |
|---|---|
| A MOTHER'S SACRIFICE. .. .. .. .. | 1 |
| THE WYNTERTONS OF NETHERWOOD. .. | 68 |
| ANSWERED AT LAST... .. . .. . | 116 |
| A STORY OF THE GREAT PLAGUE. .. | 149 |

# A Mother's Sacrifice.

FROM THE RUSSIAN.

## I.

NASTA, the letter-carrier, had never ceased to weep over the loss of her little Wasylek. One day the pope of Tersow, meeting her on the high-road as she was going her rounds from the town of Smolnica to the villages, stopped and, wishing to console her, said: "Why do you continue to grieve in this manner, Nasta? You may be assured that your little boy is now among the cherubim in heaven."

The cherubim! Never in her life had Nasta heard of such beings, and the words of the friendly priest, far from affording her any comfort, only seemed to trouble and agitate her. It was a year ago that her darling Wasylek had died, a year ago that the poor, shabby little coffin was carried to the cemetery by a kindly neighbour amid a blinding snow-storm, carefully sheltered beneath his sheepskin cloak.

For a whole week the poor woman thought

over what the pope* had said to her, but the words conveyed no meaning to her mind. The next Sunday, however, it happened that as she was passing a Latin church which was on her daily route she thought she would go in. She was just in time for the sermon. The preacher spoke of the majesty of God, of the armies of heaven, of the legions of angels, of the seraphim and cherubim standing around the throne of the Most High. Nasta listened as if spell-bound, and eagerly drunk in all he said. It seemed to her as if she were listening to one who had lately seen her lost boy and knew all about him.

When she left the church her head was full of the wonders of which she had been hearing, and as she went on her way to the village of Spas she strove to treasure up in her memory the words of the preacher, repeating them over and over to herself like the prayers of the Rosary. But the thread of her intelligence was too weak to retain them; one by one the ideas slipped away and were lost, like the beads of a necklace when the string has broken. One expression alone remained impressed on her memory: *the armies of heaven!*

This idea was a new one to the ignorant peasant-woman, and by no means a welcome one. Then God, too, who was the King of

* This name is given to the secular clergy of the Russian Church, of which the Czar is the supreme head. The Latin, or uniate, priests, still in union with Rome, are in Poland few in number, and are regarded with jealousy and dislike by the parochial clergy.

heaven, had an army like the Emperor of Russia, and in that army Wasylek had taken service in the capacity of a cherubim. Now, Nasta knew a good deal about military life; she had often heard letters from soldiers read aloud, and they were invariably in the same strain: always begging for money, always complaining of the captain's harshness or of the brutality of the corporal. The remembrance of this caused her great concern. Until then she had simply mourned for the loss of her only child; now anxiety on his behalf was added to her grief. If the poor little fellow were really enrolled in the ranks of the celestial militia, one of two things must be true: either he was ill-treated, and it was his mother's duty to exert herself to protect him; or he was unhappy, and she must do something to cheer and help him. The thought that the child, who was now beyond the reach of all earthly sufferings, might perhaps be enduring still worse torments in the unseen world to which he had gone, filled the poor mother's heart with anguish.

If she had dared, how gladly would she have at once turned back and gone to the Latin priest in his presbytery, and asked him what the army of heaven really was, and what were the nine choirs of angels of which he had spoken. A clergyman would know all about such matters, and who knows, might he not perchance even be able to inform her into what choir, or rather what battalion, Wasylek had entered? But how

should a poor woman like her take the liberty of questioning a priest, and a Latin too? Besides, she was already late, she would be behind her time in reaching Spas, and M. Krzespel, the inspector of the imperial domains, would be getting very impatient at not having his papers.

Nasta was the walking post between the village of Spas and the post-office at Smolnica. It was her business to deliver the letters first to the inspector, then to the Jews who kept the public-houses, and the small proprietors in the neighbouring hamlets who could not fetch their own letters, and lastly, in summer-time, to the visitors who came thither for the benefit of the mountain air. Her husband had been the postman of the district, and on his death, ten years before, Nasta had been allowed to take his place.

She had not married young, and scarcely two years after the birth of her little boy her husband had died suddenly. All that he bequeathed to her was a cottage whose roof was fast crumbling into decay, a barren strip of garden ground through which ran a stream, shaded at its source by a pear-tree of such antiquity that no one could remember having seen any fruit on its boughs. Nasta's duty consisted in walking to and from the post-office every day with the letters. For this she was paid two florins a month—about five francs! She used to start at day-break, for it took her two hours to walk there and two to come back; for the remainder of the day she worked in the fields. In summer-

time her task was comparatively easy, and she could easily get back by midday; but in winter, in the long, hard frosts, it was indeed toilsome work, since the post was often delayed by the weather, and at times she had to wade through deep snow-drifts, for on that side of the Carpathian Mountains the winters are very severe. But as long as her child was alive what did Nasta care for hard work and biting cold?

One day an epidemic broke out among the village children. It attacked their throats, and in two days proved fatal. Soon there were as many newly made mounds in the churchyard of Busowiska, where Nasta lived, as there had been children of twelve years old or thereabouts at that time. Just a year before our story opens, when Nasta, coming back from her daily round one morning, reached the foot of the mountain where she was accustomed to see Wasylek, who took care of the sheep of a neighbouring farmer, waiting for her, the child was nowhere to be perceived. A horrible apprehension seized upon her; she ran like one demented to her cottage. There she found Wasylek, wrapped in his father's old sheepskin, lying on the ground beside the earthenware stove, his round eyes fixed on the ceiling in a stupefied stare. Alas! the next day but one those eyes were closed for ever. Until that fatal hour Nasta had envied no one, she had been as happy as a queen; her dark, dilapidated cottage was to her a palatial residence, the old pear-tree a smiling orchard, the

murmur of the brook the sweetest melody; but from the moment when Wasylek was laid in his narrow churchyard bed all the sunshine faded out of the poor woman's life. Her cabin appeared desolate, her orchard a sterile plot of ground, while the babble of the stream became a strain of such woful sadness that many a time, as she listened to it in the stillness of the night, she thought she really must divert it from its course, that she might no longer hear its mournful plaint. Everything wore an altered aspect in her eyes; even her daily walk to the post seemed to have become lengthened in distance in an unaccountable manner, and the road looked dull and dreary, although it was enlivened by many carriages and briskas containing travellers from far and near.

Formerly, in happier times, when she neared home after delivering the letters in some outlying hamlet up among the mountains, she used to descry a little figure crouching among the furze-bushes, hardly distinguishable at a distance from the stones and rocks around him. And then this little figure would be seen flitting among the bushes and over the greensward, or lost to sight for a moment between tall sheaves of corn, to reappear suddenly at the bend of the road. Poor Wasylek! With his huge, unshapely straw hat, his jacket of coarse hempen cloth, caught together in front and fastened with a bit of stick, and his whip three times as big as himself in his hand, he looked uncommonly like the scarecrows set up in a wheat-field to keep the birds from the

corn. But the queer little mannikin had two bright black eyes that gleamed under the rim of his battered hat, and very dear he was to the poor letter-carrier, who when she caught sight of him used to stop and open her bag, from the depths of which she never failed to produce some toothsome cake or crisp biscuit. But now, alas! though spring was spreading its verdant covering over the earth, there was no little grey figure awaiting her by the roadside, or running over the freshly ploughed fields. Alas, indeed, the earth, the inexorable earth, had swallowed him up and held him fast locked in her prison-house!

However, from the time that the idea that her darling boy was enrolled among the cherubim in Paradise had sunk into the mind of the bereaved mother, she no longer felt lonely. As she went on her daily rounds one thought constantly pursued her like a spectre, and life was no more a dreary, hopeless blank. If only she could acquaint herself with what her child was doing up there in the choirs of the heavenly host! But how was she to learn this? How was she to span the gulf that separated him from her? For some time this idea engrossed her mind so completely that she could think of nothing else. Being naturally diffident and slow of speech, she was reluctant to make her difficulties known to others and seek information from them. One day, however, she plucked up courage to begin to speak on the subject to the organist of the Latin church.

"What can I do to prevent my poor little

Wasylek feeling himself a desolate orphan up in heaven?" she inquired in a mysterious whisper. The organist, who considered himself a great authority on theological matters, looked at her with an air of supreme commiseration, and, after a moment's reflection, answered: "Wasylek will only cease to be an orphan in heaven when you die."

Nasta was completely silenced by this unexpected answer. When she died! But who knows how long it may be before one dies, and must the poor child wait in misery all that time? Perhaps Honorius, the man at the Monastery of St. Basil, who had grown grey in the service of the monks, would be able to give her some wise counsel. She resolved, therefore, to watch for him on the road when he was driving back from market through the forest.

Honorius was a taciturn man, and he let her tell her tale without interruption. When she had done, he fixed his eyes for a minute on the leathern bag strapped across his chest, then slowly taking his pipe from his lips, and pointing upward with his long, lean finger, he replied in a grave tone, not unmingled with irony: "What would you have? If only some clever person would invent a postal service between earth and heaven!"

Satisfied with this laconic answer, he replaced his pipe in his mouth and closed his lips, as if to say nothing more was to be got out of him that day. "If only there could be a post to heaven!"

Nasta repeated to herself, as she watched him disappear beneath the archway of verdant pines. "But unfortunately there is not any!"

At Busowiska there was no Catholic Church, nor even a *cerkiew* of the Greek Church, the one that existed there having been burnt down several years previously to the time of which we are speaking, and never rebuilt. The inhabitants were consequently, as is the case in many villages of the Carpathian Mountains, destitute of all religious teaching. This accounts for the benighted condition of Nasta's mind, and her strange ignorance of sacred things. On great festivals the people were in the habit of going to the church of Tersow, the nearest parish. Nasta was accustomed to go there once a year, on Good Friday, to adore the holy images, and to get her Easter eggs and cakes blessed. Since the death of her child she had not been at all. What was the good of getting her cakes blessed when there was nobody at home to eat them? And as to prayer! since her affliction the unhappy woman had had less than ever recourse to prayer.

But now that a fresh direction had been given to her thoughts she felt the need of religion, and resolved to go again to church. There would certainly be a sermon, and who could tell whether the priest might not say something on the subject of the cherubim and the angels, about which she had heard on a previous occasion?

This time, however, there was not a word

about the armies of heaven. The preacher spoke of prayer; how omnipotent it was, how it afforded consolation and strength to the afflicted and suffering souls, how by it a communication was opened with heaven, so that it might be termed a kind of *post* between earth and the unseen world.

Of the first part of the sermon Nasta comprehended little. She sat and listened, heaving a deep sigh and striking her breast now and again, after the manner of the Russian peasant, who believes the word preached would be of no profit to him without such exterior demonstrations.

But when the last words fell on her ear she was startled and aroused. She ceased to strike her breast, and fixed her eyes on the preacher, anxious not to lose a word. So there really was a post between earth and heaven! Honorius had been quite mistaken when he said there was no such thing.

But in order to make use of this means of communication one must know how to pray, and Nasta was sadly conscious of her own ignorance in this respect. If she could get through the *Pater* it was as much as she could do; as for the *Credo*, she could go no further than the first sentence. Besides, she reasoned to herself, in this one prayer that she knew by heart there was not a word that could apply to Wasylek; so of what use could it be? If a prayer was to be compared with a letter, one must make it very clear to whom it was addressed, just as if a letter was to be delivered the direction must be clearly written on the outside.

Nasta could not pray any more than she could write. She must find some one to do it for her. Now, at Busowiska, if a poor man wanted to write to his son in the army, he went into the town to a public scribe, whose business it was to write letters for those who could not write for themselves. Of course the writer was paid for his trouble, but that was not all; one had to go to the post-office and get a stamp to put on the letter, otherwise it would be no use. Then, too, there ought to be a remittance enclosed to make the letter of any value. She knew that the man Dimitry had even sold his goat in order to send money to his son, who was a soldier. Another of her neighbours had pledged her coral necklace for the sake of sending a few florins to a boy who was serving in Hungary, far away beyond the mountains. She must not imagine, Nasta told herself, that she could get what she wanted for nothing. She was poor enough, Heaven knows! but that could not be helped, and in this world nothing can be got without paying a price for it.

For some time Nasta went about with her head bent down, her brows knitted as if she were endeavouring to solve some abstruse problem. In fact, just then her ideas were not very clear; people and things were oddly jumbled together in her brain: the celestial cherubim, Honorius the convent servant, the priest of Tersow, the post to heaven, the public scribe, and Dimitry's goat.

And yet through the darkness of her unen-

lightened and untaught mind a ray of divine light was slowly struggling. Little by little, through the maze of her own singular process of thought, she arrived at two conclusions. First she learnt to master her grief, and then, with the marvellous intuition of maternal love, she discerned that most sublime of Christian truths, the necessity of sacrifice. Whatever it might cost her, she must make some sacrifice for Wasylek—the sacrifice of something indispensable, something purchased by the hardships of her daily life; by hunger and thirst, sleepless nights, toilsome journeys beneath a burning sun, in cutting wind and biting frost. Some alchemy must be found whereby these privations, these vigils, this sweat of hers—nay, her very lifeblood, should be transmuted into that thing most valuable and most difficult to procure—money! What was so precious in her eyes as money, slowly and painfully coined out of the toils, the sweat of the peasant?

Nasta knew by experience how indispensable money is. How often had she seen the tears, the misery, the despair, occasioned by the want of this miserable pelf! There was a man in an adjacent village who had met with a series of misfortunes; his son had been taken by the conscription, his wife had died shortly after, his crops had failed; these and other troubles he had borne with tolerable equanimity, but when his savings were stolen, the small hoard he had amassed so laboriously to satisfy the claims of the money-lender, the poor man had shut the

door of his cabin and hung himself in despair. Yes, everything was hard in this life, but to earn money was the hardest of all.

The result of Nasta's reflections was the practical conclusion that in order to do anything she must have money, and a considerable sum too. But her idea of a considerable sum was extremely vague. What would constitute a considerable sum? Perhaps, when one could begin to count, not with copper coins or paper money, but with shining gold pieces. She would spare and save to the utmost of her power, and surely in time she would have enough.

A new epoch now commenced for Nasta. The world wore a brighter aspect; and if her mind had not altogether regained its former serenity, at any rate she now had a definite purpose in view, to save money! Hitherto no one could have accused her of avarice, but now at the sight of a few coins a hungry look came into her eyes, and when she could clutch a few dirty bits of copper in her horny hand, it seemed as if the gates of Paradise were opening to her. So sparingly did she live that she actually managed to keep intact the few francs which were paid her each month. She denied herself salt, the sole condiment of the peasant, and lived on dry bread and boiled potatoes, her only beverage being the water from her own spring, since milk was a luxury which must henceforth be dispensed with. No sooner did she return from her daily journey than she went to work in the fields of a neigh-

bouring farmer, labouring like a horse to earn a scanty meal, never complaining so long as she could meet with employment. So great was her anxiety to obtain money in every possible way that one day she was caught by old Marina, a professional beggar, in the act of soliciting alms from the passers-by on the high-road. That was too bad; such impudence could not be allowed, that she, an employee of the state, should have the effrontery to stand there in open daylight and take the bread out of the mouths of honest beggars! Amid a torrent of abuse the old woman hobbled after Nasta as fast as her failing breath and her infirmities would permit, prepared, could she overtake her, to deal her a sound blow with her crutch. But Nasta quickly made off without a word, and as soon as she was out of the old cripple's sight, resumed her mendicant character.

After several months had elapsed she bethought herself that it was time to consider what should be done with her hoard. In the interval she had made inquiries as to the customary way of testifying affection for and remembrance of the dead. She had been told this was done by reciting prayers, having Masses said, and giving alms on their behalf.

It is a good work to give alms to the poor, the priest had said to her. Alms to the poor! Pray, who in all Busowiska was so poor as herself? Certainly not the old beggar-woman who had threatened to beat her with her crutch; but even

if Nasta were to give all her earnings to Marina who would be the gainer? Why Marina, of course, not Wasylek; and Nasta wanted Wasylek, and Wasylek alone, to have the benefit of every penny.

A Mass would certainly be far more profitable, but then what a very short time a Mass lasted. No sooner had the priest gone up to the altar than it was over. Nasta must really continue to find some means of praying continually for her child. She remembered that a wealthy lady in the vicinity, whose children had all died one after the other, had built a chapel in honour of the Mother of God, and not long after a son had been born to her, a fine, healthy child, who was growing up as sturdy as a young oak. In consequence of having erected this chapel the lady had acquired the title of foundress, *fondatorka*, of the parish. Nasta pronounced this word with an accent of respect not unmingled with envy. Would to God that she could have became a *fondatorka* for her little Wasylek's sake! Of course a chapel was quite out of the question, but might she not erect a statue? That would be the very thing she wanted; something that would pray night and day for Wasylek, which would itself be a continual prayer. Moreover, no one would pass by it without paying it some token of respect, without making the sign of the cross, or sending up to heaven some supplication, and all that would be so much the more for Wasylek. What a harvest might thus be gained!

Delighted with her idea, Nasta began to make a minute inspection of all the statues and sacred images situated on the high-road. Here a lofty cross stretched its arms to heaven; there, within a tiny shrine, the feeble flame of a lamp flickered before a holy picture. Further on an imposing figure of St. Nicholas, clad in pontifical vestments, met the eye; or of St. John Nepomucen, wearing a white cotta and black biretta. What struck her most was a life-sized figure of St. Michael, arrayed in helmet and cuirass, proudly contemplating a formidable dragon writhing at his feet. This statue was an object of great veneration in all the country round, and certainly it had the chief claim on Nasta's devotion, for had not the sacristan told her that the glorious archangel was the captain of the heavenly hosts? Undoubtedly, therefore, it was with him that Wasylek had to do. How delightful it would be if she could only erect a statue like this at the foot of the mountain by the wayside, where in happier days her beloved child used to be waiting to greet her! But the difficulty was to find out where statues were manufactured. Nasta had never heard of one of her neighbours getting anything of the sort, nor did she remember having seen such wares exposed for sale at any fair or market. An unexpected turn of event enabled her to obtain the desired information

## II.

The reason why the parish of Busowiska was so much neglected was because, as has been said, the church had been burned down several years previously, and, despite the repeated admonitions addressed to them by the government, the village commonalty, not knowing how to raise the necessary funds, had taken no steps for its reconstruction. Besides, they argued, what object was there in doing so? They might just as well go to the next parish to perform their devotions. And once, when the Mayor did make a stir about the matter, he was quickly overruled and silenced by the votes of his colleagues. In fact, the good people thought themselves quite secure until one day, when the local board was sitting, who should suddenly appear on the scene but the Archdeacon of the diocese, accompanied by the pope of Tersow and his sacristan!

The Archdeacon began by upbraiding the peasants for their negligence in tolerating such a disgraceful state of things. It was a shame to the village, he said, and to the diocese, and a mortal sin on the conscience of all of them. The Bishop was so angry with the people that he declared Busowiska to be the most godless parish under his charge, and predicted that if they persevered in their obstinacy they would become like the barren fig-tree of the Gospel, which bore no fruit, and was only fit to be cut down and cast into the fire.

The village magnates listened in blank silence to this address, and the mention of the barren fig-tree impressed them forcibly. In the preceding year as many as ten fires had broken out on different homesteads in the parish, and again that year there had already been four. Perhaps this was a judgment upon them. After all, there was a great deal of truth in what the Archdeacon said.

Scarcely was this short allocution ended when a rumbling was heard on the pavement outside, and, amid a cloud of dust, M. Krzespel, the Government Inspector, alighted from his yellow cabriolet in all the dignity of his official cap and gold-laced coat. The peasants made way for him with deferential respect, and he began at once to harangue them in the loud, commanding tone he assumed on important occasions.

"Yes, yes," he said, "I fully concur in everything that the venerable Archdeacon has been saying about the church. In fact, the matter is quite settled; the deeds are drawn up and officially stamped and signed. There is no getting out of it now; the community is bound to rebuild the *cerkiew* whether they like it or no. I, the Imperial Inspector, have come in person to announce this to you!" Then, finding his hearers, who were all aghast at these tidings, uttered no word of protest, he added in a somewhat less imperious manner that his Majesty the Emperor had graciously given permission for the wood required for the building to be cut in the imperial forests. There was, therefore, no time

to be lost—a commission must be appointed to arrange about the work at once. The discomfited village authorities glanced furtively at one another. They all felt that further resistance was impossible. The order was drawn up, signed and sealed. The Bishop, the Archdeacon, the Inspector, all said it must be done, and done it must be. But what had most influence with them was the assurance that the Emperor would provide the material for the structure. "Well, well," they said resignedly, "we will rebuild it."

Before many days had passed, the inhabitants of Busowiska were not only completely reconciled to the idea, but took all the credit of it to themselves, boasting of the alacrity with which they had spontaneously agreed to make the sacrifice, and incur the expense of rebuilding the *cerkiew* for the public good. Some braggarts even went so far as to say that it must be constructed of solid bricks, that the cupola must be surmounted by a gilded cross, and that the services of a first-rate artist must be secured for the decoration of the interior.

All that sounded well, but the offer of the Inspector to furnish the wood reduced the fine talk to sober sense. The church was to be of wood, but at any rate the best builder that could be found must be commissioned to build it. This gave rise to fresh discussions. Some proposed a local celebrity, who had erected a church at no great distance; others wanted a man whose name was more widely known.

Finally, all agreed that Klymasko, an architect of some note, was the man most suitable to be entrusted with the work. Had not engravings of the beautiful temples he had erected appeared from time to time in the illustrated journals? Besides, one of Klymasko's peculiarities was that he always perferred to construct his churches of wood rather than of brick. He used to conceive the designs for them out in the forest, lying on his back on the mossy ground in the shade of the pines. What material, he would say, so fitting for a temple to the Most High as the trees of the forest, which breathe an atmosphere of recollection and of prayer, in whose branches the whispering wind and the song of the birds proclaim the power and greatness of God? Better far than walls of mud raised by the hand of man. Undoubtedly, Klymasko was the man they wanted; and a deputation was forthwith appointed who should go without delay to the great man, and request him to erect in the village of Busowiska a *cerkiew* of elegant design and ample dimensions.

Klymasko at first made some difficulties about accepting the commission on account of his age and infirmities, but he ended by yielding to the entreaties of the villagers; and a few days later he came in person to inspect the site of the former church. He was a little, old man, with finely-cut features and a long, white moustache. In his clear blue eyes there lurked a mischievous twinkle, while his snow-white hair, falling

on to his shoulders from beneath the large felt hat worn by the mountaineers of those parts, gave him somewhat of a patriarchal aspect. He first examined the plot of ground where the old church had stood, and expressed his approval of it. It was a level space surrounded by lime-trees, and from its height it dominated the whole village. Then he took his measurements carefully with line and rule, planting little stakes at regular intervals in the ground. He laid strict injunctions on the villagers that no one was to interfere with these, and gave a few directions as to the preparation of the wood. This done he tossed off the glass of brandy offered him by the Mayor, and took his leave.

After these preliminaries had been arranged, the people of Busowiska considered the enterprise fairly begun. The mysterious little stakes were regarded with solemn veneration, and most of the inhabitants came at least once a day to inspect them. Soon, however, the work was commenced in earnest. The blows of the axe and the grinding of the saw were heard beneath the branches of the lime-trees, mingled with the rough voices of the carters unloading the huge trunks from their wagons.

Nasta, her mind still engrossed with her fixed idea, often hung about the spot. It occurred to her that she could easily learn from the workmen what she desired so much to know. She began in a roundabout way by enquiring timidly: "Isn't it very hard work to plane those great beams?"

The men answered with another question, after the manner of the Slavs:

"That is so; but how should it be otherwise than hard?"

Nasta took courage to continue: "But to shape stone, is not that still harder work?"

"Of course it is; what a question to ask!"

Gradually she contrived to worm out of the men the information she wanted. She learnt that there were masons who worked in stone, some of whom fashioned fine statues like those she had seen, and that the nearest sculptor resided in the town of Stambor, a long distance from Busowiska.

Having elicited these facts, Nasta resolved to act with promptitude. The very next day, on her return from the post-office, she would walk to Stambor. True, she would have twenty-one kilometres to cover on the way there, and the same to come back; but no matter: if she could not return before sunset, she would come by night. The next day happened to be Thursday too, the market-day at Stambor, so the people from the villages would be driving in to make their purchases, and surely some one or other would give her a lift on the way. Nasta had never been in Stambor—in fact, she had never been in any very large town: thus on arriving there she was greatly impressed by its magnificence. How different it was from anything she had ever seen! How spacious the market-place was, and how beautifully paved

with flag-stones! And on one side of the great square there was a town-hall with an imposing clock-tower, and over the clock there was a golden stag that glittered in the sun and turned with every breath of wind! And, greatest wonder of all, every time the hour struck, a watchman came out of the tower, and blew his horn towards each of the four points of the compass. But what Nasta admired most was the handsome church, with white walls and a red roof, and the rows of beautiful shops under the arcade, where everything might be bought for which heart could wish.

Nasta did not linger among these novel sights, but inquired her way to the stonemason's yard. It was quite out of the town, and as she went thither she felt no slight trepidation. However, she summoned up all her courage and presence of mind, and, on reaching the door, she entered boldly. Two men were at work in the yard; they wore long aprons and were almost as white as millers. They were engaged in chiselling two great blocks of stone, and at every blow of the hammer a shower of chips fell all round them. Now, Nasta had dressed herself in her best for the occasion; she had tied a clean white 'kerchief over her head, a string of beads round her neck, and her Sunday apron round her waist, yet the men actually took her for a beggar, and in no gentle terms bade her begone!

She was not going to be so easily baffled. Now that she was once there, it behoved her to

stand her ground bravely and show no sign of timidity. She therefore began in a low, steady voice, as if she were reciting a prayer, to explain the object of her coming. She came, she said, to procure a statue, because some one had told her that there were sculptors at Stambor who carved statues, and she wanted one of stone, hard stone, of a man's height, with wings and a plume of feathers. Yes, with two wings, and a helmet with a crest, and a sword, at his side, like the one at Staromiasta—they must surely know it; it stood on the highway near the toll-gate, not far from the cottage where the cobbler lived. He was an Archangel, named Michael, and stood under a little shrine, but the roof was falling to pieces and wanted repairing.

The masons had stopped their work, and stared in bewildered amazement at the intruder, who thus rambled on about a cobbler named Michael who lived in a shrine near the toll-gate!

"What Michael is she talking about?" asked the foreman, coming forward. "Have we an order from any one of that name?"

He made Nasta repeat her story, and at last got an inkling of her meaning. "A statue of the Archangel Michael, you mean, like the one at Staromiasta. Yes, yes, I understand. And for whom is it wanted?"

"It is I who want it," Nasta faltered.

"It is for yourself? Are you, then, the *fondatorka?*"

The faint colour suffused the thin cheeks of the

letter-carrier, and a feeling of indescribable gratification filled her heart. "Yes, it is for me," she repeated.

"Have you the money to pay for it?"

Nasta nodded in sign of assent.

"Are you aware how much such a figure of St. Michael would cost?"

"No, I am not," she replied.

"Do you want a pedestal, too?"

Nasta had not the slightest idea what a pedestal was, but she would not betray her ignorance. "A pedestal, too," she rejoined unflinchingly.

"It would cost at least a hundred florins."

A hundred florins! A sudden darkness fell before Nasta's eyes, and strange noises sounded in her ears. Her head grew dizzy, and she experienced the awful sensation of one who, at the cost of infinite pain and toil, has scaled an inaccessible height, and feels the ground giving way beneath his feet.

Poor Nasta! In a moment she fell from the ideal height of her cherished dream—the dream which but a few minutes before had seemed so near realization. Down she fell on to the pitiless stones of the weary road her aching feet had unremittingly trodden for so many years. And alas! at the same time all hope vanished of acquiring the glorious title of *fondatorka!*

A hundred florins! The idea of such an enormous amount had never entered her head. She had never even attempted to reckon so high,

for never had any but the most trifling sums passed through her hands. She stood dumbfounded, transfixed to the ground in the presence of the stonemasons, not knowing what to do next. Suddenly she resolved to have recourse to flight, as the best means of escaping from the embarrassing situation. Before the men could recover from their surprise she turned on her heel, crossed the threshold, and ran off down the road as fast as her feet could carry her. On and on she ran, like a hunted hare, until she reached the tollgate, where she sunk breathless and exhausted on the roadside.

Who can tell the thoughts that passed through her mind in the course of her headlong flight? Was it as much the revelation of her own impotency as a bitter sense of humiliation that wounded her so keenly?

Side by side with the laudable desire of sacrifice, that spontaneous and pure offspring of maternal solicitude, pride, the inherent vice of human nature, had insidiously taken possession of her soul. Actuated at the outset simply by the wish to benefit her child, she had gradually been attracted by the dazzling prospect of herself becoming a *fondatorka*. Now the anticipated glory had vanished like smoke, and left nothing but the sorrow of a disconsolate and crestfallen mother.

But when the first sharp pang of disappointment had subsided, Nasta settled down by degrees into the stolid, resigned, apathetic

indifference that characterizes the Slavonian peasant, and is the result of the dogged resistance of the race to foreign dominion. She had been foolish and proud, and now she was punished for it. How could a miserable, poverty-stricken creature like her, who earned a scanty pittance in the sweat of her brow, dream of aspiring to imitate a great and wealthy lady! She had certainly quite forgotten who and what she was.

After a while, however, a new project began to take shape in Nasta's brain. She could not have a statue, since the price asked for it was so exorbitant, but she would have a picture. What an excellent idea! A painting could not be expensive, for what was wanted for it? Only a square of canvas and a few colours. She might have a painting of the Blessed Virgin, for instance, and the picture could be nailed upon the old ash-tree by the wayside at the foot of the hill just on the very spot where Wasylek used to feed his sheep and watch for her coming. A couple of boards would make a roof over it, to preserve it from being spoilt by the rain. Only this time she must take good care to inquire beforehand about the price, and, when she had made quite sure, go to the painter without hesitation or diffidence, and, above all, without pride.

## III.

Every summer a considerable number of visitors used to come to Spas for the sake of the mountain air, and to drink the *gentitza*, or sheep's milk. For the most part they were Jews from Lemberg, but now and again there were people of some distinction among the temporary residents in the picturesque village. Now it happened this year that the arrivals were of a better class than usual, and Nasta, for once, was in luck's way. No one grudged a gratuity to the bearer of letters often anxiously looked for and eagerly welcomed; thus many were the copper coins, not to speak of occasional pieces of silver, that were placed in her outstretched palm. Nasta knew every one of the visitors by sight. Amongst all who came this season two persons specially interested her: a lady of rank—a real Countess, the owner of large estates in the neighbourhood—and her nephew, a young artist. All the inhabitants of Spas, from M. Krzespel and his family down to the humblest peasant, deemed the presence among them of a lady of such high degree a great honour. Every day the Countess's plump, short figure might be seen trotting up and down the mountain paths, leaning on her gold-headed walking-stick and attended by her companion, a lady no longer young, tall and thin, who was invariably dressed in some shade of gray. The countess did not drink the *gentitza*,

and certainly did not look as if she wanted it, for she was the very personification of health.

The young man, on the contrary, appeared extremely fragile and delicate. He spent almost the whole day out of doors, wandering about alone, or else walking with the countess, though he was scarcely able to keep up with his vigorous and vivacious companion. Nasta, watching him, observed that he was frequently compelled to stop and gasp painfully for breath. Every day he dragged himself with difficulty up the zigzag path that led to the summit of a fir-clad hill, where a summer-house had been erected. At intervals along the path rustic seats were placed, and at almost every one of these the poor young man was fain to pause and rest. And when once he got to the top, he remained there so long that Nasta sometimes asked herself if he was going to spend the night there. He sat gazing out on the blue mountains in the distance, drawing on large sheets of paper, reading the books he took up with him; or else he sat motionless, leaning back with his eyes closed, and so melancholy an expression upon his countenance that it went to one's heart to see him. But when the Countess made her appearance and sat down by him, somewhat out of breath, and with her merry chatter drew him into conversation, his manner changed, and he would laugh and joke until a violent fit of coughing reduced him to silence. Nasta was sorry for him, for day by day the dark circles round his eyes grew deeper, and his hollow

cheeks looked still more sunken. One day, when she went up to the summer-house with a letter for the Countess, she heard her speaking very seriously to M. Sigismund. He appeared much agitated, and hid his face in his white, emaciated hands. Nasta handed the letter to the Countess, who, glancing at the hand-writing, exclaimed eagerly, "There, it is from Vera!" M. Sigismund looked up with an anxious, wistful expression, and made a movement as if he would rise from his seat; then, dropping back, he kept his large eyes, bright with the light of fever, fixed on the letter, as if he expected it would contain something for him. But apparently there was nothing, not even a message; for the Countess, after running her eyes over the pages, thrust it impatiently into her pocket, and with a thoughtful, absent air began nervously to trace figures on the sand at her feet with her gold-headed cane.

On another occasion, when Nasta went up with the letters, she found the young artist alone in the summer-house. He was seated at an easel, painting something on the canvas before him. Every moment he raised his eyes and looked at the landscape, stretching away from the village at his feet to the distant frontier of Hungary. It was a delightful morning; in the valley below the Dniester, meandering among the meadow-lands, shone in the sun like a silver ribbon, whilst the blue peaks of the Carpathians rose majestically in the background, and in the far distance,

so clear was the air, the outline of the Beskides might be discerned, trending away towards the horizon. Nasta, advancing cautiously on tiptoe, standing in the shadow of the pines, saw, to her surprise, on the canvas upon the easel the exact counterpart of the panorama before her: the same blue sky, the same verdant hills, the same river winding round the ramparts of Staromiasta, the very groups of firs that marked the familiar homesteads. An involuntary exclamation of wonder and delight escaped her lips. M. Sigismund turned round sharply, and the poor woman, fearing lest she should have displeased him, hastened to deprecate his anger by giving him his letters. He smiled, and thanked her with a nod; then, perceiving that she lingered a moment, he thought she expected something and put his hand into his pocket. But it was not money that she wanted. A sudden thought had flashed into her mind. Here was an opportunity such as she could never hope to meet with again. Throwing herself on her knees before the young man, she kissed his hands and feet, murmuring that she had a great favour to ask of him. Her tongue once loosed, her words flowed apace, and encouraged by M. Sigismund's manner, which betrayed no impatience, she confided to him, without any circumlocution, her desire to procure a picture of Our Lady—a large picture, not painted on paper, but upon a board, so that it could be nailed upon the tree where Wasylek used to meet her. She did not ask it as a gift—

God forbid that she should be so bold!—no, she would give for it all that she possessed. And as she spoke she put aside her neckerchief and drew out a tiny bag, which she wore round her neck like a scapular, containing her little hoard, and plucked at the strings to open it; but her hands trembled so violently that she only got them into a knot.

The artist motioned to her to desist. "Leave your bag alone, my good woman," he said, "and tell me why you want this picture. Have you made a vow?"

Emboldened by the interest he displayed, Nasta poured out her whole story. She told him of Wasylek's death; what she had heard about the cherubim and the army of heaven; of her wish to obtain a statue of St. Michael, and the disappointing result of her expedition to Stambor. A smile passed over the young man's features as he listened to this strange tale. He thought for a moment, and then said: "I will paint you a Madonna, and it shall cost you nothing; only instead of being painted on a board, and fastened to the ash-tree by the way-side, it shall be painted on a smooth canvas, and you can give it to your village *cerkiew*. Is there not a church in Busowiska?"

Flushed with excitement, Nasta listened without a word. She hesitated what to reply. The proposal was almost too good to be true; and yet, on the other hand, it was hard to give up the project she had formed of having her picture

exposed on the highroad in the place she had chosen for it. But on reflection her reason told her that it would be folly on her part to make difficulties where so generous an offer was concerned. She anwsered that a new church was actually in course of erection at Busowiska, that it would soon be finished, and that she could wish for nothing better than to present a holy picture to it. In fact, her neighbours were clubbing together to offer, one a pair of candlesticks, another a chalice or a monstrance, and so on. When she came to think of it, too, a picture such as she wanted would be far more suitably placed in a church than by the wayside, where the rain and sun would spoil it. How much longer it would be preserved! Why, it would be there for years and years when she herself was in her grave. At this thought her heart overflowed with gratitude; she kissed her benefactor's hands again and again, with tears of joy and thankfulness.

M. Sigismund promised that the picture should be taken in hand the very next day. He was only a *dilettante*, who painted for his own amusement, and had never attempted a religious subject; but the idea of painting an altar-piece for a village church up among the mountains took his fancy, and his natural kindness of heart found pleasure in the thought of giving real delight to a poor and lonely woman. Besides, it would be an object to work for, and the composition of the picture would be a distraction from the gloomy

thoughts that harassed him. Accordingly, he set about it with a passionate energy that he had not displayed for years, throwing himself so completely into his work that he forgot all else, and almost grudged himself the time to take his meals. He could hardly be persuaded to leave the house for a breath of fresh air. The Countess, not knowing what whim had taken him, scolded and lectured him by turns on the folly of shutting himself up in-doors, when he had come there for the express purpose of enjoying the warm sun and invigorating breezes. He expressed contrition and promised amendment, but no sooner was she gone out than he took up his brushes again with undiminished zeal and feverish impatience.

The character in which he had chosen to represent the Blessed Virgin was that of a reaper. She was seated on a heap of sheaves, her sickle by her side, apparently resting after a day's labour. The Child Jesus, at her feet, was playing with a garland of cornflowers which she was holding out to Him with a smile. There was an easy grace, an indefinable attraction about this composition which charmed and fascinated the beholder. The Virgin was dressed in the picturesque costume worn by the peasant women of that part of Russian Poland: the chemisette richly embroidered with colours, the bodice trimmed with lace, the bead necklace, the brightly tinted apron; but, contrary to custom, she had not the muslin kerchief which formed the

traditional headdress of the Slavs. Her head was bare, its only ornament a thick plait of golden hair. In the background of the picture the thatched roofs of Busowiska and the new church were discernible, while the outline of the gray Carpathians stood out against the azure sky. The only fault that could be found with this Madonna was that her features had more of poetic beauty than the sublime purity that one is accustomed to connect with the Mother of God. The countenance was so human, so appealing, that when once seen it could not easily be forgotten.

The day when Nasta was admitted into the studio, and the finished work was exhibited to her, was a memorable one indeed. It was so much more beautiful than anything she had been able to conceive that she could hardly believe her senses. Was it possible that this lovely countenance, this life-like figure of the Blessed Virgin, was really for her? She was almost beside herself with joy. At last her wish was fulfilled, her long-cherished object attained! By giving this to the church she would be able to perpetuate the name and memory of her child, to seize the mysterious connecting link that would reunite the desolate mother on earth with the lost son who was enrolled in the ranks of the angels. When she realized this gratitude too strong to find expression in words filled Nasta's heart. She burst into tears, and stood speechless, with parted lips and clasped hands, looking

alternately at the picture before her and the young man at her side, who had been the means of procuring for her such unspeakable happiness.

Meanwhile the edifice which was being erected under Klymasko's orders was rapidly approaching completion. Already its slender cupolas might be descried from afar sharply defined against the clear blue sky; stout buttresses of solid oak sustained the wooden walls, and skilfully carved pillars supported the pointed arches of the windows. Every one admired the elegance and originality of the design, and the inhabitants of Busowiska, on whom so much pressure had to be brought to bear before they would undertake the construction of their church, were now delighted with the success of their enterprise. All the talk of the village was of the magnificent gifts which various individuals had announced their intention of making. One had promised a bell, another an altar, a third some fine candlesticks. But these vague promises could not be relied on; it was necessary to know definitely what was to be contributed; a day was therefore fixed on which a meeting should be held in the new building, when, in presence of the authorities, each intending benefactor should give in his name and specify the nature of the offering he was prepared to make.

On the day in question the pope Tarezanin, the priest of the adjoining parish, accompanied by the Inspector in his official dress, came to

preside over the meeting. The Mayor of the village, too, was there, with the sheriff; and the sacristan of Tersow, Sorok, was seated at a table, pen in hand, ready to note down the promised gifts. A crowd of villagers had assembled in the unfinished church, but, strangely enough, it was remarked that those who stood in the foremost ranks were the poorest of all, who certainly could not be expected to offer anything, whereas those who were in affluent circumstances, who had boasted of the liberality they were about to display, kept in the background or held aloof altogether. An ominous silence prevailed; no one came forward. The pope looked up inquiringly, not well pleased at the aspect of affairs; the Mayor moved uneasily in his seat; the clerk brandished his pen expectantly; every one seemed embarrassed. At length M. Krzespel's patience was exhausted; he rose up, and, speaking loudly enough to be heard by all present, exclaimed: "What a set of simpletons you are! Do you suppose I have taken the trouble to come here that you may stare at me as if I were a wild beast?"

Stirred up to action by these words, the Mayor in his turn sprang to his feet and threw himself into the crowd, as if he would compel the intending benefactors by main force to come forward. Indescribable confusion prevailed; every one began to protest, to excuse himself, to repeat the promises made by others. The wealthiest man in the place, who had been heard over and over

again to say he would give a peal of bells to the church, now swore by all his gods that he never intended to give anything more than a hand-bell. Another, who had agreed to present a triptych with gilded doors, now declared he had only spoken of a small statuette. The gorgeous set of vestments which a third had as good as pledged himself to provide shrank to the dimensions of a few yards of linen; and the altar of which a fourth was to be the donor was replaced by a couple of wax candles. What was to be done? There was no alternative but to accept the situation; a feeling of disappointment and shame weighed on all who were present. Just as the assembly was about to break up a woman elbowed her way through the crowd. It was Nasta, her haggard features transformed by an unwonted glow of pride and happiness. She advanced to the table, respectfully kissed the pope's hand, made a profound obeisance to the inspector, nodded to the sacristan, and then said in a low voice: "I wish my name put down."

A murmur of surprise, an ironical titter, ran through the crowd; all listened eagerly, pressing forward to see what would happen. Nasta did not note this, as her back was turned to the people; but the satirical smile on the face of the mayor disconcerted her so much that she was on the eve of making a hasty retreat, when Pope Tarezanin came to her help, inquiring kindly: "Well, my good woman, what is it you wish to offer?"

"An altar," was the reply.

An altar! The pope himself could not restrain a smile, as he contemplated the poverty-stricken appearance of the figure before him. "Speak out, my good Nasta," he continued; "do not be afraid, tell me what you really mean. You know the smallest offering from the poor man is more acceptable to God than the most munificent gifts of the rich."

"I wish to give an altar, a complete altar," rejoined Nasta.

"I think you hardly know what you are pledging yourself to," the pope replied. "There are so many things wanted to furnish an altar; there must be an image or picture, a pair of candlesticks, and many things besides."

"I will give a picture," answered Nasta calmly, "a beautiful picture of the Holy Virgin, painted in oils. And as for the other things—there, put my name down." As she spoke she laid upon the table a small, greasy bag, and without waiting to explain herself further, or take any notice of the members of the building committee, she turned round, made her way through the crowd and disappeared. Once outside the door she ran off, followed by the shouts and jeers of the people, who had tried in vain to hold her back, and never stopped until she reached her half-ruined cabin, her neglected orchard, her murmuring brook.

Meanwhile the pope took up the bag and, with ever-increasing wonderment, emptied the

contents on to the table. It contained nothing but florins, paper money, dirty, tattered, and torn. One by one he unfolded them and began to reckon them up; the longer he went on, the greater was his astonishment and that of the bystanders—5, 10, 15, that was nothing like all; 20, 25, 30; there were still more; 35, 40, 41, that was the last; 41 Austrian florins! The worthy priest could scarcely believe his eyes, and the peasants around stood staring in open-mouthed amazement.

Touched to the heart by this unexpected incident, the priest resolved to turn it to account for the edification of the people. With tears in his eyes, and in tones less steady than usual, he spoke to them of the widow's mite, an offering more pleasing to God than any other, adding that the sacrifice made by this poor woman ought to be an example to all the village, for doubtless that day there was joy in the presence of the angels of God on account of it. This short address was not without effect on the impressionable peasants. Some struck their breasts in compunction, others hung their heads in shame. Then a man stepped up rather red in the face, twisting his hat awkwardly in his hands, and said that as to the handbell he had promised, perhaps it would be more convenient to have one that could be hung in the belfry, for after all it was a full-sized church bell that he had the intention of giving. Another man followed immediately, and in a fussy manner asked the

clerk to read out what his name was put down for to prevent any mistake, and when Sorok replied that two tapers stood inscribed on the list, he laughed aloud and said the most important thing was omitted—the altar itself that he meant to offer! After the same fashion almost all the other intending donors came forward to make additions to their respective contributions; thus an hour later, when the pope Tarezanin was driving home in his briska, his countenance wore a satisfied smile, and he told himself that the meeting which had opened so unpropitiously had terminated far better than he could have hoped.

And what had become of Nasta? When the almost fanatical excitement that had sustained her until then at last gave way, she threw herself down, worn out with fatigue and consumed with hunger, by her desolate hearth, and drawing from among the ashes the bowl of porridge that had been standing there since the morning, devoured its contents with the avidity of a famished animal. The cravings of her appetite satisfied, she drew around her her scanty garments, and laid herself down where the last rays of the setting sun cast a parting gleam, and, closing her eyes, slept the dreamless sleep of the weary and over-wrought.

Thus terminated the momentous day, the day of Nasta's greatest happiness and triumph, the day when she earned the coveted title of *fondatorka*, the day wherein, if the pope Tarezanin is

to be believed, the angels in heaven rejoiced over the sacrifices she had made.

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## IV.

Shortly after, the altar provided by Nasta's generosity, and fashioned by the skilful hand of a local carver, was set up in a side-chapel of the new building, and the picture of Our Lady of the Harvest, handsomely framed, was carefully hung in its place by M. Sigismund's own servant. Placed in a good light it was a conspicuous object in the half-empty church, and the effect it produced was very fine. The whole village flocked to see this picture, of the existence of which they had been kept in ignorance, and all, whether they came from devotion or curiosity, were greatly impressed by its beauty and elegance. But it was with the women especially that the Virgin of the Harvest found favour. Their feminine intuition went straight to the mark. They comprehended that this picture was intended to be, to a certain extent, the apotheosis of their own life of daily toil, and their hearts went out in gratitude to her who had deigned to work and to be weary like them. The men, on the other hand, were less warm in their admiration. The very thing that was so attractive to

the women had a contrary effect on the sterner sex. Our Lady of the Harvest was too much like one of themselves to inspire them with the profound veneration and respect wherewith they were accustomed to regard their sacred images. Standing in a group before it, they shook their heads with a dissatisfied air, unable to formulate in words the feelings it evoked.

At that moment the painter who had been engaged to decorate the church made his appearance. He was brother-in-law to Sorok, the sacristan of the neighbouring parish of Tersow, by whose persuasions the building committee had been induced to give him the commission; but not until two of their number, who considered themselves competent to judge of such matters, had been deputed to inspect some specimens of his talent to be seen in an adjacent town. One of these consisted of an elaborate sign-board suspended over an apothecary's shop; the other a religious picture in a church, supposed to illustrate the parable of the grain of mustard-seed, although the connection between the subject and the execution was not quite apparent. But the vivid colours and burnished gold of these gaudy but worthless productions sufficed to convince the ignorant peasants that the painter merited their confidence, and on his arrival at Busowiska he was escorted by the Mayor himself to the church. Like most self-educated, pretentious persons, this man, whose name was Kurzanski, was

excessively conceited and consequential, and expected every one to treat him with deference. He was fashionably dressed, and behaved to the Mayor and the members of the committee in a supercilious, condescending manner. No sooner did he enter the church than the painting over Nasta's altar caught his eye. "What do I see here?" he exclaimed indignantly; "what is this disgraceful thing?" And, heedless of the sanctity of the place, he spat on the ground, according to the Russian mode of expressing scorn and disgust. Sorok, his brother-in-law, who followed him, immediately did the same.

"It is a scandal," the painter went on, addressing the bystanders. "Do you hear? I tell you it is a scandal to have that here; it is no sacred picture. Take it down and throw it out of the church."

"Yes," echoed Sorok emphatically, "it is a scandalous thing—nay more, it is heretical."

The members of the committee looked at one another in consternation.

"See there," some of the men whispered; "did we not say there was something wrong about that picture? Kurzanski saw at once what was amiss: it is heretical. There is no gold or silver about it; it is not like a Madonna."

"It is not a Madonna at all," said one. "Heaven knows what it is," murmured a second. "That comes of Nasta's mysterious ways, and her fine altar," added a third. "We knew it from the first; we were fools not to say so."

Kurzanski, meanwhile, standing in front of the picture, continued to give vent to his feelings by contemptuous shrugs and gestures of scornful pity, when suddenly a woman came forward and, placing herself before him, said reproachfully: "You should know that this picture represents the Blessed Virgin, the holy Mother of God."

The speaker was one Thecla, a woman of good sense and sound judgment, whose education and means entitled her to rank among the aristocracy of the village; she was the only person who would venture to bid defiance to such a man as Kurzanski. "It is the holy Mother of God," she repeated, looking him full in the face.

"That the Mother of God!" he exclaimed; "that the Blessed Virgin? Never in my life did I see such a one! And what Virgin is it, if you please? I know all the *icons*;" he ran off a list of names: "Our Lady of the Pillar, Our Lady of Ransom, Our Lady of Dolours, etc., etc. Pray what may this be?"

"Our Lady of the Harvest," replied Thecla, unabashed. "What is there to object to in that?"

Kurzanski laughed derisively. "Our Lady a working-woman, a day-labourer? I like that! See the way she is dressed, like any one of you people. She has got a coral necklace and an embroidered bodice, like a mountaineer of Busowiska. Why, the next thing will be to paint Christ in a sheep-skin and felt hat, with an axe in his hand. And you ask what there is to object to? Never in my life did I meet with so ignorant a woman!"

"And never in my life," retorted Thecla, "did I meet with a painter who knew so little about art! Is a mere dabbler in colours like you to decry such a beautiful work as this? What if Our Lady is represented as a peasant, though she is Queen of Heaven? Have I not myself seen his Majesty the emperor dressed like any one of his subjects? Besides, when Our Blessed Lady was on earth she was a poor woman, just like one of us, and worked for her daily bread. Perhaps you do not know that she used to spin the garments that her Divine Son wore? I advise you to keep your clever remarks to yourself, if you care at all about your reputation."

The illustrious sign-painter felt he had found more than his match, but just as he was opening his mouth to reply, a fresh person appeared on the scene. It was the architect Klymasko, who had come over to Busowiska to complete some unfinished details, and take a survey of his work as a whole. His coming was hailed by all parties as a relief. "Here is Klymasko; Providence has sent him at the right moment," they cried. "He understands these things; let him be the judge; he shall decide."

When the old man had been informed of the subject of dispute he stood awhile contemplating the picture in silence. As he gazed, a smile began to play about his lips, and he muttered something under his breath. The painter, who was watching him closely, interpreted this smile as a victory for himself. "Well," he asked at

length, "did you ever see such a Madonna as that?"

"Such a Madonna as that?" repeated the architect slowly, without withdrawing his eyes from the canvas; "no, I never did—never in my whole life." Had Kurzanski been a little less undiscerning he would have perceived that the smile on Klymasko's features was not one of contempt, but of deep feeling; the old man seemed struggling with an emotion which he could hardly repress. Long and fixedly he looked at the picture, and the longer he looked the more it gained on him. Besides, did he not recognize in the background a *fac-simile* of the new church, his last production, which he had designed and planned and placed under the protection of the Holy Virgin? As he looked, a tear gathered in his eye, and presently rolled down his furrowed cheek. Then he fell on his knees, and touched the ground with his forehead three times, as is the custom on Good Friday when the Cross is adored.

Carried away by the force of example, all present prostrated themselves before the Madonna, in whose favour the scale was now turned. Kurzanski and the sacristan did the best thing they could, which was to slip away unperceived.

On the following day the village maidens brought garlands of flowers to adorn the new altar. Thecla, who had as yet presented nothing to the church, procured from the nearest town

two splendid candlesticks of shining metal, fitted with tapers of the whitest wax, while some pious ladies of the vicinity arranged some drapery around the picture, tied with bows of ribbon, and finally contributed a handsome carpet. This done, so elegant was the appearance of the chapel that the villagers agreed among themselves that the proposed artistic decoration would be quite superfluous. Nasta knew not how to contain herself for joy; every free moment she hastened to the church, and knelt motionless at the feet of her Madonna in ecstatic adoration.

One afternoon an equipage stopped at the door of the little church, and from it the Countess was seen to alight, followed by her inseparable companion. No sooner did the Countess's glance rest on the picture than she started, coloured slightly, and, turning to her companion, her eyes flashing with indignation: "Look, Mlle. Pichet," she exclaimed, "just look at that! What, do you not see? It is she—it is Vera!"

The lady addressed, whose apathetic demeanour showed a complete absence of interest in what she saw around her, glanced in the direction of the picture.

"Yes, certainly, Countess!" she rejoined; "it is she; there is no doubt about it."

"No, it cannot be," the impetuous little lady resumed; "my eyes deceive me. Sigismund would never have been so bold!"

However, it was impossible to deny that the features depicted on the canvas before them were

those of M. Sigismund's beautiful cousin. The Countess recognized the perfect oval of her face, the dark violet eyes, the thick plaits of golden hair, of which she was so vain, wound round her shapely head; it was undoubtedly Vera herself. And yet it was not Vera, for there was something in this portrait which was lacking to the coquettish votary of the world; her beauty was etherealized, spiritualized. The light that gleamed from Vera's eyes was a far more mundane flame than the chaste brilliance of the Virgin's pure orbs; there was little that was akin to the calm, sweet smile that played on Mary's lips in the voluptuous expression of Vera's somewhat sensuous mouth. The grave countenance of the Madonna reflected the serenity of a spotless soul, while Vera's haughty features bespoke the insolence of the fashionable beauty, confident of her charms. No, the Countess would not allow that it was Vera: there was the whole world, or rather the whole heaven between the two! So she appealed once more to her companion.

"It cannot be, Mlle. Pichet; most decidedly it is not she!"

"You are right, madame," rejoined the echo; "most assuredly it is not she!"

"And yet," added the elder lady, "I could never bring myself to pray before that picture."

"No, Countess, neither could I."

But after all, the Countess said to herself, perhaps Sigismund was not to blame if he had invested the Queen of Angels with the features

of his earthly love. What harm was there in idealizing and refining her beauty, surrounding it with a celestial halo, the creation of his poetic fancy? All the celebrated Madonnas were not conceived by the artists in moments of rapture, revealed in an ecstatic vision. What matter if Sigismund had really drawn his inspiration from the countenance of the woman he adored? Should she on this account refuse to kneel before this picture, the offspring of his hopeless love, of his sorrowing heart, the last work perhaps he would ever execute? "Come, Mlle. Pichet," she murmured gently, "let us kneel down and say a prayer for him, poor fellow!—and for *her*."

"With all my heart, madame, for him and for her."

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## V.

From the day when the partisans of Our Lady of the Harvest had won so memorable a victory, a storm seemed gathering over the village of Busowiska. The enthusiastic admiration which Nasta's picture excited in all true lovers of art exasperated the narrow-minded sign-painter, who could not endure to see homage paid to talent to which he could not but be sensible that his own was vastly inferior. Both he and his brother-in-law, Sorok, the sacristan of Tersow

neglected no means of covertly stirring up the villagers against this production of modern taste, which ran counter to all their ignorant prejudices and preconceived notions of what religious pictures ought to be. Gradually the discontent so carefully fomented spread to the building committee, while among the labouring class the aggrieved painter found ready listeners, since their jealousy was excited by the distinction accruing to that beggar Nasta, as they termed her, on account of her being the donor of the picture. "What does it matter to us," said some of the most opinionated and undiscerning of the committee, "what Klymasko, or Thecla, or any one else thinks about the picture? We do not like it; it is different from what one is accustomed to see in the churches, and bears no resemblance to the famous time-honoured Madonnas, nearly black with age, on a gold background, surrounded with *ex votos*."

"I think," said Sorok, "that you are very wrong to tolerate such a painting in your church. It is a sin for which you will have to answer."

"It gives us scandal," interposed another, "and in the interests of the parishioners we should do well to get rid of it."

"Who obliges us to keep it?" demanded a fourth.

The Mayor, a man of pacific temperament, here intervened. Of all things he dreaded a public scandal, and he did his best to effect an accommodation. "It would never do to lay

hands on a gift that has been approved and accepted by the committee," he said authoritatively; "indeed, I could never give my consent to such a thing. It is a matter for the clergy to decide; let us await their judgment."

This proposal was received with approbation by all present. At the suggestion of Sorok a deputation was sent to the neighbouring monastery of St. Basil, to consult an old monk who had been Kurzanski's teacher, and who enjoyed the reputation of being a great master of the Byzantine school. The result of this step was, however, only to make matters worse. The aged artist, who could give no opinion respecting a picture which he had never seen, having listened to the description given him, began to discourse sagely about art in general in terms of which his hearers understood nothing. But the impression made on them, owing to the previous bias of their minds, was anything but favourable to the Virgin of the Harvest, and from that moment the fate of the picture was decided. The only question was, what should be done with it; some wanted to turn it out of the church, others would be content with nothing less than destroying it altogether.

The unhappy Nasta, alarmed on behalf of her Madonna, had not a single tranquil moment. She went about her work with set teeth, a despairing look on her countenance, and a ferocious gleam in her eyes. It was said that she carried some weapon hidden in her dress, and kept watch

all night at the door of the church to safeguard her treasure. When these rumours reached the ears of the Mayor, he deemed it advisable to take the precaution of locking up the church and keeping the key in his own possession. Then he sent for Nasta, and assured her that she need fear no violence being done to the picture, and that, should the clergy pronounce against it, not only should it be returned to her, but all the money expended on the altar should be refunded. The poor woman was tranquillized to a great extent by these assurances, but she could not feel quite satisfied as to the safety of the picture. One morning, when she was on her way to Spas, the thought struck her that she would appeal to the kind artist on its behalf. Surely the young man would not refuse to enlist the good offices of the Countess, who on her part would use her influence with the Inspector, and induce him to give directions to the municipality of Busowiska not to touch the picture. Who could say that he would not even drive over himself, in his official cap and gold-laced coat, to issue his commands, and then all would be well.

While Nasta was consoling herself with these reflections, as she tramped with bare feet along the dusty road, pope Tarezanin arrived at Busowiska. He was met at the door of the church by the wily sign-painter, who explained in a few words the state of affairs.

Now, the good priest was himself in nowise insensible to the subtle charm of this unconven-

tional painting, and as he looked at the lovely Madonna he resolved to spare no effort to save it from destruction. He had not been many minutes in the church before he was surrounded by a crowd of clamorous villagers, calling on him in no very respectful manner to order the removal of the picture. The babel of voices was deafening, and the priest felt that the Madonna would not long be safe among these angry disputants. He saw, too, that in order to pacify them, prompt and decided action was neceseary. He therefore gave orders to the sacristan to take down the canvas from its place, and having seen it carefully deposited in his *briska*, he whipped up his horses and drove off at a quick pace in the direction of his presbytery.

This unexpected act was regarded in the light of a victory by the iconoclastic faction, and they exulted accordingly. Just as the jubilation reached its height, Thecla, who had been apprized of what was going on, came hurriedly into the church, her countenance all aglow with indignation. When her eyes fell upon the dismantled altar, she wrung her hands and uttered a cry of consternation.

"You will have reason to repent what you have done to-day," she exclaimed, snatching from their places the tapers which had been her gift. "God will punish you for it; yes, mark my words, He will surely punish you for it; you have driven away the Blessed Mary, the holy Mother of God!"

These prophetic words, solemnly pronounced, sounded like a knell in the ears of the astonished villagers. They looked at one another in dismay, and even those who had boasted the loudest, went home in crestfallen silence.

Meanwhile, Nasta, on reaching Spas, went at once to ask for M. Sigismund. But she was met with the intelligence that on the preceding day he had been found in the summer-house in a state of unconsciousness, and had been carried home looking like a corpse. In fact, he was at first thought to be dying. Later on he had recovered, opened his eyes, and tried to speak. In the night, however, he had been taken much worse, so that another doctor was called in, and a messenger dispatched in all haste to Lemberg to summon a physician of eminence. The Countess was in deep distress; she had never left his bedside.

These tidings were a great shock to Nasta. She turned as white as a sheet, her head swam, and for a moment she could not collect her senses sufficiently to find her way to the hotel where the young artist was staying. She did not ask herself for what purpose she was going thither; she did not even know whether she would gain admission; she obeyed a sort of instinct like that which impels a faithful dog to seek his master's side. She found the house-door standing open and entered without any one saying a word to her. Many people were coming and going, so that she had no difficulty in gaining access to the

room adjoining the sick-chamber, where she occasionally caught a glimpse of M. Sigismund lying motionless on a couch, more pale, more hollow-eyed than ever. The Countess sat beside him, her countenance disfigured with weeping, her eyes fixed upon his pallid features. Now and again she spoke a few words to him in a caressing manner, but without eliciting any response. At length, bending over him with the air of one who announces welcome news, "Come, Sigismund," she said, "look at me. You must get a little better now. You know we are expecting a visitor to-day—a visitor whom you will be delighted to see."

He turned towards her, his large, dark eyes, lustrous with the light of fever, and smiled a strange, sad smile.

"Cannot you guess?" she continued, looking at him with a scrutinizing gaze, "who is coming to-night? Cannot you guess whom I mean?"

The sick man heaved a deep sigh, the smile that played about his lips grew sadder still, as he faintly murmured: "You mean Vera. But I am awaiting the coming of another visitor." Then the smile faded away, and he relapsed into apparent lethargy.

At that moment the physician from Lemberg was announced. The Countess came forward to meet him, and Nasta crept away on tiptoe. She went down-stairs and seated herself on the door-step, where, her head resting on her hands, she gave herself up to her own melancholy thoughts.

She had been there about an hour when the doctor issued from the house, looking very grave, and drove away in his carriage. Not long after a tinkling bell was heard, heralding the approach of the Latin priest, who, arrayed in cassock and cotta, preceded by an acolyte and followed by the sacristan, came to administer the last sacraments to the dying man according to the rites of the Catholic Church.

There was a great deal of stir and bustle in the hotel for a time; then it gradually subsided, and Nasta became aware that the stillness which followed was the stillness of death. Throwing her apron over her head, she remained sitting there in a sort of stupefaction until she was aroused by a hand laid upon her shoulder. Looking up she beheld one of her neighbours from Busowiska, a woman named Frederica, one as poor and lonesome as she herself, but far less ignorant, and held in great esteem for her piety.

"I am glad to find you here, Nasta," she said, "for now I need look no further for some one to watch with me to-night by the gentleman who is dead. Come along; the Countess will pay you well."

Nasta stared at her with an air of bewilderment. She arose mechanically and followed her companion. It was growing dark, and when the two women entered the chamber of death, they found that the sacristan was already lighting the wax tapers that stood in tall candlesticks on each side of the couch, while the Countess's companion,

with a basket in her hand, was placing some freshly-cut roses on the pillow and in the hands of the deceased. Frederica, who was said to know all the prayers in the prayer-book by heart, knelt down at the foot of the bed and commenced reciting her orisons; Nasta, kneeling by her side, listened in admiring attention, marvelling in her ignorance at the length of the prayers and the fluency with which they were uttered. Here and there, she caught a familiar word, and repeated it over and over to herself with all the fervour of her heart.

In those still hours of the night, in the solemn presence of death, Nasta learnt how to pray. A sentiment of profound compunction stirred within her soul, and brought the tears to her eyes. Her belief in the unseen world, whither her child, and now her friend, had gone, was strengthened, and the light of true faith dawned upon her untutored intelligence. Thus the long hours passed away; Frederica's lips still moved, but her utterance became broken and indistinct, and the beads she was holding slipped from her fingers. Nasta's head dropped upon her breast, and, overcome with fatigue and emotion, she fell asleep.

Just as the rosy dawn touched the mountain-tops and lit up the heavens, a slight noise, like the rustling of wings, startled the two watchers. They sprang to their feet in vague terror, and a cold perspiration broke out over them. For there, close to the head of the bed whereon the young

man lay, something moved, something quivered, and in the dim light of the tapers the outline of a figure was plainly discernible. And while the women, paralyzed with fear, stared straight before them with wide-opened eyes, the first soft rays of light stealing into the darkened chamber revealed the fair and gentle countenance of Our Lady of the Harvest! Awe-struck and amazed, in reverent silence they bent their faces to the ground, afraid even to gaze upon what appeared a celestial vision.

When Frederica at length ventured to look up, the figure had disappeared, and the room was flooded with golden light. Thereupon the old woman got up, and, without saying a word to Nasta, quickly took her departure, eager to be the first to communicate to her friends and neighbours at Busowiska the wonderful apparition she had seen, and kneel in homage before the picture of the Madonna.

Nasta did not move until the men came to arrange the catafalque and lay the body in the coffin. Nor did she leave her post when they had finished; she was still kneeling in a corner of the room when the Countess and her companion came in to pray beside the dead. Presently a whispered conversation in French passed between the two.

"Where is Vera?" asked the Countess, bending towards Mlle. Pichet.

"She left about an hour ago," was the answer.

"What, so soon!" exclaimed the Countess,

and a frown of displeasure contracted her brow. The younger lady then explained that Mlle. Vera had arrived very late on the preceding night, and had been much distressed on hearing what had happened. She would not be persuaded to go to bed, but at dawn she insisted on going alone to the chamber of death; the sight had so much overcome her that, without so much as opening her travelling bag or waiting until the Countess was dressed, she had returned at once to the friends from whom she came, leaving word that she would perhaps come for the funeral.

The Countess listened with ill-concealed anger. "Gone back to her friends, did you say? Ah, I understand, heartless creature! This is Mme. Lanowski's *fête*, and there will be dancing to-night."

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## VI.

The tidings brought by Frederica created a great sensation in Busowiska. The story of the apparition spread from house to house like wild-fire and was everywhere believed, for the narrator bore the character of a truthful and trustworthy woman. Before many hours had passed, every one in the place was talking of the singular occurrence. Doubtless, they said, it was as a recompense for having painted the picture in her

honour that Our Lady had appeared at the bedside of the artist after his death. But in that case a miracle had taken place, and alas! the picture which had won for him so signal a mark of her favour was gone; they had banished it from their *cerkiew*, they had banished the Mother of Christ from their village! Thecla's words now recurred to their memory like the oracular utterances of an inspired sibyl. A sense of guilt weighed upon them, and those who had decried the picture most vehemently, contrived to keep out of the way.

Nasta, unaware of what had taken place on the previous day during her absence, trudged slowly homeward, her mind deeply impressed with all that had just occurred. On reaching her cabin she hardly paused a moment, but hastened on to the church to prostrate herself befcre her beloved picture, now more precious than ever in her eyes. The door was no longer locked; it stood wide open. She flew towards the chapel of Our Lady; the painting was not there! On each side of the altar the muslin drapery hung in strips, the ribbons were torn, the flowers crushed, the candlesticks removed; worst of all, the Madonna, her own Madonna, was gone! Wild with excitement and grief, Nasta rushed from the church uttering inarticulate cries, which soon drew a crowd around her. Thecla came up and, putting her arms around her, endeavoured to soothe the poor woman. Her friends were triumphant now. "Yes," they said, "we were right all

along. We knew it was a wonderful picture; it was that wretched Kurzanski's jealousy that did all the mischief. Was it not proof enough that so many strangers came all through the summer from all the country round, to pray before it? And the flowers and offerings they brought, too —did all that mean nothing? Klymasko was right when he bent his head to the ground and venerated it as we venerate the holy *icons*. Every one knows how clever he is, and how many churches he has built to the glory of God. Now the Blessed Virgin has asserted herself and discomfited all her enemies. Perhaps the poor young gentleman had seen her in a vision before he painted the picture. Alas! how foolish they had been to let it go. Who could tell what would be the consequences of their folly?"

Now, there was an old soldier sitting on a fence close by who had listened with a satirical smile to this jeremiad. At its close he stood up, and, taking his pipe from his mouth, addressed the assembly: "What will be the consequences of your conduct, do you ask? Cannot you guess, you simpletons? I can tell you what the consequence will be. The consequence will be that the parish of Tersow will possess a miraculous picture, and you will not. Hundreds will flock from far and near to see it; a plenary indulgence will be granted every year; pilgrimages will be made to it and processions will come, and of all this you will not have the benefit. The pope Tarezanin knew very well what he was about

when he carried off that picture; a Madonna like that is a mine of wealth. It makes the fortune of the priest, of the sacristan, of the whole parish. Devout people will bring offerings to the shrine; the concourse of strangers will be the making of the town. That sly fox, Sorok, has outwitted you. He remembered that he was sacristan at Tersow, not at Busowiska. Now that he has your picture in his safe-keeping, he can afford to laugh at you."

These plain, matter-of-fact words produced the desired effect. This practical view of the matter had not presented itself to the minds of the peasants, and the halo of sentiment was quickly dispelled. The most sceptical and indifferent now took a personal interest in the picture. The man who had formerly been sacristan, and who looked forward to filling the same post in the new church, felt that he had been duped—nay more, made the victim of a vile conspiracy, sacrificed to the interests of another. Who of all men would suffer to the extent he would from the loss of the picture, which would have been to him a source of many privileges and much emolument? "If that is so," he said, "we must get it back; we must get back our Madonna."

"Do you not know better than that?" retorted the soldier. "It is easy enough to part with a thing, but not so easy to get it back. The people of Tersow are not the fools we are; they will not give it up."

"We will take it from them," all present

exclaimed with one voice. "Come, friends, let us go at once to Tersow!"

"To Tersow!" repeated the women, and even the children re-echoed the cry. "To Tersow!" shouted Nasta, shaking herself free from the hands that sought to detain her, and starting off at once in the direction of the town. The crowd, arming themselves with whatever came readiest to hand—sticks, stakes, flails, and even hatchets, followed her in disorder, some impelled by the hope of material advantages, others actuated by religious fervour, but one and all bent on the recovery of Our Lady of the Harvest.

The soldier alone held aloof, deeming it more prudent not to mix himself up in the disturbance he had been the means of exciting. However, as his neighbours were hurrying off, he gave them a few hints as to their strategical movements, bidding them advance upon the presbytery from behind, so as to gain access to the adjoining church without giving the alarm to the inhabitants of the place.

Just as the party of villagers bent on the execution of their hostile designs, approached Tersow, which was not many miles from Busowiska, by one road, the pope Tarezanin, unaware of their coming, drove away by another that led in an opposite direction. He was going to consult his ecclesiastical superiors as to the course to be pursued in regard to the picture; thus he was absent when the enemy appeared under the walls

of the presbytery. The door was cautiously opened by Sorok, the sacristan; but when he caught sight of the forces drawn up outside, he hastened to close it again. Before he could accomplish this, however, he was seized and dragged out by two or three stalwart peasants. "We want our Madonna," they shouted in his ears; "give us back our Madonna! Do you hear, you thief? What have you done with it?"

The terrified beadle pointed towards the door of the sacristy, for there in reality the pope had locked up the picture. "Where is the key? Give us the key!" vociferated the crowd. "Let me go," replied the wily Sorok, "and I will fetch you the key immediately." No sooner was he released from the hands that held him in their iron grasp than he sprang over the garden fence, and darted away with the speed of a greyhound. A few men started in pursuit of him; but it was useless, he had completely disappeared from sight. The party of attack wavered, at a loss how to act.

At this juncture Nasta, almost maddened by disappointment and the long strain she had undergone, snatched a hatchet from the hand of a bystander and led the way to the sacristy. The others followed her; the door soon yielded to a few vigorous blows, and as it fell, the serene and smiling features of Our Lady of the Harvest were revealed to the intruders' view. Involuntarily they fell upon their knees before the picture, in hushed and reverent silence. At

the self-same moment, as the people were pressing round the door of the sacristy, the glittering helmets and gleaming bayonets of a band of gendarmes appeared on the road. Sorok in his hasty flight had encountered them on their way towards the town, and had begged them to interfere to prevent the pillage of the church. The sight of an armed force had not in this instance its usual effect of intimidating the peasants; they held their ground firmly, standing in front of the Madonna, whilst the younger men greeted the approaching gendarmes with a volley of stones. Then, taking the picture on their shoulders, all prepared to depart. But the gendarmes, incensed at being assailed with a storm of missiles, endeavoured to bar their passage; whereupon one of the villagers, losing patience, hurled the hatchet he was carrying at his opponents. The report of a rifle immediately followed, and some one was heard to fall heavily to the ground. It was Nasta who fell, wounded by the gendarme's bullet. At the sight of blood the people of Busowiska attacked the gendarmes with such fury that, being few in number, they were fain to retreat into the presbytery; while the others, finding the road clear, hastily formed into ranks and marched off in the direction of their own village.

Nasta strove to regain her feet, but fell back powerless. Her neighbours raised her in their arms and carried her homeward in the rear of the picture, which was borne aloft like a standard.

Presently one of the party began to intone the hymn, "O Virgin Immaculate;" the rest took it up, and like a triumphal procession they proceeded on their way. Attracted by the sound of the singing the peasants came out of their cottages by the road-side, or ran up from the fields where they were at work, and seeing the band, now orderly and devout, joined their ranks, until hundreds of voices swelled the chorus of joy and praise that echoed along the valley of the Dniester, and rose in solemn strain to the very gates of Heaven.

The procession halted at the door of the new church of Busowiska. But when the men who were carrying the *fondatorka* attempted to place her on her feet, that she too might enter and behold the Madonna replaced upon her altar, she was found to be dead. Poor Nasta! her sacrifice and her sufferings had been accepted; she will grieve over the loss of her little Wasylek no longer.

Our Lady of the Harvest still continues to be an object of veneration in the church of Busowiska. It is hardly necessary to inform the reader that the popular idea that the picture is a miraculous one has never received authentication, nor has the local devotion been sanctioned by the ecclesiastical authorities.

# The Wynertons of Netherwood.

## I.

AMBROSE WYNTERTON was my oldest friend. Our friendship dated from the time when we were school-boys together, and as years went on, it grew and strengthened until we became like brothers. We were all the more attached to one another because, happening both of us to be the only children of our parents, there was no one in our respective homes to whom the closeness of our union could afford cause for jealousy, as might possibly have been the case had we either of us possessed brothers or sisters to claim our affection.

Mr. Wynterton went into the army, and might have achieved a brilliant career had he not chosen to give up his profession early in life, on account of unexpectedly finding himself the owner of Netherwood Court, an estate in the southwest of England, bequeathed to him by an aged eccentric lady whose especial favourite he had always been. Shortly after his acquisition of this property he

married a Spanish lady, with whom he had fallen in love during the course of a visit he paid to her native country. Little indeed did I suspect, as I first grasped the hand of the happy bridegroom, and congratulated him on the conquest he had made, how melancholy a story his was destined to be, and what a sad and sorrowful secret I should be called on to keep! Little did I suspect, as I stood beside him on the sunny slopes of his broad domain, that, as years went on, a shadow would slowly creep up and obliterate the brightness of the scene, changing mirth into mourning, and gladness into grief!

I am an old man now; my experience of men and things has been, in the course of my life, both varied and extensive, and as the result of that experience I can truly say that the strangest stories that are ever written are not half so strange or so improbable as those that are never written and never read, nor, indeed, ever known beyond the immediate circle of the individuals whom they most intimately concern. Nor does the world at large ever dream of the misery and remorse that sometimes lurk beneath the mask of an apparently enviable and prosperous lot, or the wretched sense of insecurity that not unseldom besets those whose good fortune appears in no danger of being shaken or disturbed, much less overthrown.

My own path in life was a humbler one than that of my friend. I had been placed whilst still young in a solicitor's office, and had my own way

to make in the world. I found the road far from smooth, at least in the beginning, and it would have seemed rougher still but for the constant solace and support afforded me by Ambrose Wynterton's affectionate and generous kindness.

My visits to Netherwood Court in my two-fold capacity of legal adviser and friend became of very frequent occurrence, and were an unvarying source of pleasure to me; the more so as its charming and accomplished mistress ever extended to me the most cordial welcome and showed the greatest kindness to her husband's friend. And most sincerely did I mourn her loss when, after some eight or nine years of wedded life, she died, leaving an infant daughter only three days old, whose presence failed to console her father's bitter grief, or diminish the gloom that was gathering on his brow. For the shadow to which I have already alluded had begun to creep up before his wife's death; indeed, he had never seemed thoroughly himself since his return from a prolonged sojourn in the South of Europe, undertaken, about six years after their marriage, for the benefit of Mrs. Wynterton's health, which had been seriously weakened by the change from the sunny skies of Spain to the chilly climate of England. During their absence from home a son had been born to them; yet, strange to say, the birth of the heir, so ardently desired, so fervently prayed for, instead of crowning and completing their felicity, had appeared to lessen and diminish it. And the

advent of their second child, the little daughter mentioned above, could scarcely have been hailed with delight, since her entrance into this world had been, as I have said, the signal for her mother's departure from it.

As a matter of course, I went down to the funeral. When the last sad rites were over, and his pious and affectionate wife had been laid to rest in the little cemetery close to the chancel of the church he had caused to be erected—then, as Ambrose Wynterton sat with me beside his desolate hearth, he for the first time hinted at the existence of a guilty secret which weighed on his mind, an unjustifiable act which he had committed in a moment of weakness, and which had ever since been to him a source of the keenest regret. For one thing, he said, he was thankful: no one knew it but himself; he had concealed it even from the loved and cherished partner of his life, to whom he had so lately bid a last farewell.

Thus he spoke and thought, but he was sadly mistaken. I already strongly suspected, if I did not actually know, the jealously-guarded secret, and I had been acquainted with that secret by none other than Mrs. Wynterton, whom he fondly imagined to have lived and died in blissful ignorance of it. Poor lady! for some time she had persistently repelled the hateful idea which forced itself upon her; and when at length it weighed too heavily upon her mind, finding herself one day alone with me, she had ventured to breathe to me, as her husband's oldest and most trusted friend,

the suspicion that tormented her. For the sake of her peace of mind I endeavoured—doing violence to my own convictions—to persuade her that she was mistaken, and I succeeded in part, not wholly; I believe the anxiety and doubt poisoned her life and hastened her death. I could not reveal this to my friend in his hour of sorrow, nor indeed say aught to urge the disclosure of a secret which he could not apparently bring his lips to utter, and which I must not as yet divulge to the reader, since at the moment in question it was nothing more than a strong suspicion—amounting, however, almost to a moral certainty—that I entertained on the subject.

So I sat for a few moments in silence, pondering what I could best reply; then, finding he showed no inclination to unbosom himself further, I said what I could to the effect that it was useless to brood over the past; that however much we might regret our actions, what was once done could not be undone, and the only thing that remained was to make the best of it. But I saw my words brought no relief or consolation, nor indeed could such vague platitudes be reasonably expected to still the upbraidings of any man's conscience. Perhaps, accustomed as I was to have him tell me everything, I felt a little hurt at the want of confidence his reticence betrayed, or perhaps the conviction that I was in possession of his secret made me feel awkward, and led me, since I dared not utter what I really thought, to take refuge in commonplaces. Our conver-

sation was prolonged for some time, but without any further reference to the avowal Captain Wynterton had made; and during the interval that followed, though we met no less frequently than formerly, he never made the remotest allusion to what he had vaguely hinted to me, and the reader will easily believe that I was not anxious to direct his thoughts to so painful a subject.

The years flowed on in a monotonous course, and were peaceful and tranquil enough for him, externally at least. The two children, Hubert and Beatrice, grew up under his eye; in fact, the latter, for whom her father showed a mark preference, was never sent to school at all, but passed from childhood into girlhood, and from girlhood into early womanhood, amid the familiar scenes of her childhood. I loved her as dearly as if she had been my own child, and was scarcely less proud of her goodness and beauty than was her fond father, to whom she vividly recalled the memory of his lost wife. Beatrice strongly resembled her mother; her beauty was of a type rarely met with, in England at least, the effect of her soft grey eyes and delicately pale complexion being heightened by her dark, silky hair and the longed curved lashes that shaded her cheek.

Netherwood Court is a place any man might be proud to call his own. The avenue of stately lime-trees which leads to the principal entrance of the grand old mansion is quite unequalled in

its own way, as far as my experience goes. The house itself forms three sides of a spacious quadrangle, and might perhaps look somewhat stern and severe but for the wealth of luxuriant creepers which cling lovingly to its venerable walls, adorning the ancient masonry with the grace and glow of youth. The grounds are extensive, admirably laid out, and so rich in evergreens of various sorts that the barrenness of winter seems for ever banished from the fortunate domain, close to which, moreover, a peaceful river winds its sinuous way, as if determined that no feature should be lacking to the sylvan loveliness of the scene. Never had it looked more attractive than on a certain cloudless June morning; at least so I thought as I drove slowly up the avenue. The limes were in full blossom, and so were the roses that abounded on every side; the air was full of sunshine and sweet scents; birds were singing their choicest melodies; all around was brightness, happiness, prosperity.

The special object of my visit was to make preliminary arrangements in regard to some business matters which Captain Wynterton desired to see concluded before the ensuing autumn, when Hubert would attain his majority. I was half-disappointed to find the family were not alone as I had expected; some friends having driven over to luncheon. They were a Mr. and Mrs. Newburgh, who were occupying during the summer months a house in a village several miles distant, and a handsome young Guardsman,

Reginald Everingham by name, who happened to be staying with them, and with whom the Wyntertons had a prior acquaintance. He sat beside Beatrice at luncheon in the lofty oak-panelled dining-room, the walls of which Captain Wynterton had adorned with his old family portraits, and they were certainly a very striking couple. Shall I confess the foolish fit of match-making in which I indulged, and own that I could not help wishing that these two might one day be united by the closest ties? For I knew that Reginald was in every way worthy to become the husband of my favourite, and it was, moreover, easy to see how much he admired her, and that she, on her side, was anything but indifferent to the attentions he paid her.

When we left the dining-room, Hubert proposed that Reginald and himself should take Beatrice for a row upon the river; and the older members of the party remained for some time sitting upon the terrace that overlooked the lawn, until at length the Newburghs, who were comparative strangers in the neighbourhood, asked to see the church, which was at a very short distance from the Court. Captain Wynterton led the way with Mrs. Newburgh, and I followed with her husband. As, however, we each had only just lighted a second cigar, we did not enter the sacred edifice, but paced up and down the road outside the gate, my companion appearing glad to avail himself of the opportunity to ask a few questions about the estate, and the manner in which it had come into its present possessor's hands.

"It is a splendid property," he remarked after a while; "I have seldom seen a house more thoroughly to my taste. The stained-glass windows on the staircase are very fine, and so is the wood-carving in the hall and dining-room. But I thought there was a chapel in the mansion—at least so I have heard."

"There was and still is one," I replied, "and Mass is said in it one day every week; but since there have been so many Catholics in the village the accommodation has proved quite insufficient for them, and so Captain Wynterton built the church on a piece of land belonging to the estate. He erected both it and the presbytery entirely at his own expense, a year or two after his marriage, and endowed it in a most munificent manner. In doing all this, however, the benefit of his dependants and co-religionists was by no means his only motive; indeed, I am inclined to think it was only a secondary one. In former times, before the so-called Reformation, this place was Church property and belonged to the Bishop of the diocese, who made use of it as a sanatorium, to which those of his priests might repair whose enfeebled health rendered necessary a temporary suspension of their labours. But in the reign of Elizabeth it was bestowed upon one of her favourites, himself an apostate, on condition of his marrying a certain lady whom the vain and jealous queen desired to remove from the court. You are no doubt aware that in cases like the present, in which a Catholic, or one who had

been a Catholic, took possession of an estate belonging by right to the Church, a curse of some kind invariably rests on the actual holder of that estate, whoever he may be. In this case the penalty has been the constant failure of an heir, so that Netherwood Court, as it is now called, has changed hands almost incessantly."

"I quite understand your meaning," Mr. Newburgh began, when I paused for a moment. "Captain Wynterton hoped that by building and endowing the church, and thus making, in part at least, restitution for the sacrilegious appropriation of ecclesiastical property, to avert the curse and obtain the blessing of an heir. I am heartily glad to see his son grown up and within a few months of coming of age; and I hope Netherwood Court may remain in the family for many generations."

At this juncture we were joined by Captain Wynterton and Mrs. Newburgh, accompanied by Father Quentin, the priest of the parish, who carried Mr. Newburgh off to inspect the interior of the church, and also to see the comfortable presbytery which its occupant evidently took delight in exhibiting. Later on we all assembled to take coffee beneath one of the spreading cedars that adorned the lawn, and soon afterwards the little party broke up.

While Captain Wynterton went to put Mrs. Newburgh into the carriage and bid farewell to his guests, I returned to the house, and made my way to the library in search of a book. As I stood

scanning the well-filled shelves, Beatrice entered.

"Ah!" she exclaimed, coming up to me in her sweet, winning way, "here you are, Mr. Temple! I was looking for you. I wanted to find you."

"Well," I said, covering with my broad palm the hand she caressingly laid on my arm, "what am I to do for you now? I see you have come to coax something out of your old friend; what is it to be? You know I am off to the Tyrol in a day or two. Do you want me to bring you back a tame chamois as a pet, or an Alpine rose warranted to blossom in the gardens of Netherwood?"

"No, no," she said, laughing; "you are only to bring back your own kind self, safe and sound. But are you really going so soon? I will tell you what I want you to do, Mr. Temple," she continued, as a graver and more anxious expression came over her countenance. "I want you to speak seriously to Hubert. I am sure he has got into debt, or done something that vexes papa; do make him tell you what it is, and give him a lecture about making papa angry."

Hubert was by no means a favourite of mine. As a boy he had given trouble through the violence of his temper, and at college he had got into a scrape by quarrelling with some disreputable acqaintances. Nor had he the generous disposition and warm, affectionate heart which often accompanies a hot and impulsive character; he was headstrong and sometimes deceitful. Perhaps he missed the softening influences of a

mother's love, for Captain Wynterton, though always just and never unkind, was, in my opinion, somewhat stern in his treatment of his heir. I knew that he had been dissatisfied with Hubert of late, but as I had heard nothing definite, I felt that it would be impossible for me to accede to Beatrice's request.

"My dear child," I answered her, "I cannot do what you ask. Hubert has never taken me into his confidence, and he would resent my interference were I to question him as to his goings-on. Indeed, it would do no good, and only make matters worse, for he would think your father had been complaining of him to me."

"Perhaps you are right," she rejoined. "I wish there was some one who had influence over him; I dare not say a word, he is so passionate and speaks so angrily to me. It does not do to thwart him; he looks at one quite savagely."

"You must remember," I said, "that he has southern blood in his veins. Yes, I know you have, too, but then you have more of your father's character, though you closely resemble your mother in person."

Beatrice's eyes wandered to a portrait of her mother which hung upon the wall opposite to us. "Did you ever see any of my mother's relatives?" she inquired. "I suppose Hubert is like some of them. He is not like papa or any of our English ancestors. Mr. Newburgh remarked that at luncheon-time when he was looking at the portraits in the dining-room, so I told him

our mother was Spanish, and we got our dark hair from her. Then he said he saw no likeness between Hubert and me. I was afraid papa would hear him; you know how he dislikes people to say that."

"What did you answer?" I asked.

"I said Hubert resembled my mother's family, and Mr. Newburgh said he was very un-English looking. I think that was all."

As she spoke I descried Hubert himself coming towards the house, accompanied by a gentleman. "Who is that with Hubert?" I asked, putting up my eye-glass to scan the stranger, who was still at some distance. "Not Mr. Everingham? I thought he went away with the Newburghs."

"Mr. Everingham? O dear no!" ejaculated Beatrice, gazing out of the window, while a deep blush overspread her cheek. "That is one of Hubert's new friends. I suppose he has just arrived. Hubert said he was going to ask him down for a day or two." From the tone in which she uttered these words it was apparent that Beatrice by no means approved of the visitor.

As the two drew near, I noticed that he was a man several years Hubert's senior, gentleman-like in appearance but not prepossessing, for the expression of his sharply-cut features was hard and cynical, not to say forbidding.

"You know him, then?" I remarked. "Has he ever been here before?"

Ere she could reply, Hubert and his friend

passed by the window, and, perceiving us, paused, as if hesitating whether to join us.

"If they are coming in here," cried Beatrice with a sudden change of manner, "I shall go, for I have a particular dislike to that man. I am obliged to show him that I do not like him," she added with a haughty movement of her head; "it makes Hubert angry, but I can't help that. I must contrive to avoid him as much as possible while he is here."

"What has the unfortunate man done to incur your royal displeasure?" I asked with a smile.

"I dislike his manner very much," she said, "and almost the first time he was here he made love to me quite openly. I tried to let him see how unacceptable his attentions were, but he would not take a hint; at last I had to be quite rude to him."

I bethought me of the favour wherewith Mr. Everingham was evidently regarded, and told myself that the maiden before me was perhaps not wholly fancy free. "Were you not a little hasty in your judgment?" I rejoined. "If you had been more civil he might have improved on further acquaintance, and in time you might even have grown to like him."

"Never!" was her emphatic reply. "You must know there are some people for whom one feels an instinctive aversion the moment one sees them, and Sir Philip is one of those people. Besides, he is a Protestant, and on that account papa would not wish me to encourage him, had I been

so inclined. But, as a matter of fact, he is the very last person I should ever think of marrying. It is really too bad of Hubert to bring him here again," she added in an aggrieved tone.

Footsteps were again heard approaching; this time it was Captain Wynterton whom we saw drawing near.

Beatrice rose from her seat. "Here comes papa to take possession of you," she exclaimed, "so I will say good-by, Mr. Temple—that is, if you really will not stay to dinner. I hope you will have a very pleasant tour, and mind you do not get lost on the mountains or fall down a precipice."

Did some secret voice whisper to me, as, availing myself of the privilege of an old man and an old friend, I bent to kiss her cheek, that when I next should see that bright and smiling face the sunshine of unalloyed happiness would have faded from it, never to return? I cannot tell; I only know that an unaccountable melancholy came over me as I bade the happy girl farewell, and turned away to join her father, who had stopped to speak to the two young men on the terrace.

## II.

It had been agreed between my partners and myself that this year I was to take my holiday early in the summer, and I had therefore made arrangements to leave home almost immediately. On my return to London after a six weeks' absence, during which I heard nothing of my friends at Netherwood, I found an unusual accumulation of business requiring my personal attention, and was in consequence prevented from going down to see them at once, as was generally my habit after having been away for any lengthened period. Before my arrears of work were got through, however, I was brought into contact with the Wyntertons in an unexpected and most painful manner.

About a week or ten days after my return I was sitting one morning in my private room at the office when a card was brought to me, inscribed *Sir Philip Fletcher*. The name seemed not altogether unfamiliar to me, though I had at the moment no very definite idea as to the identity of my visitor. I gave orders that he should be shown in, and on his entering the room I immediately recognized him as the individual I had seen with Hubert on the occasion of my last visit to Netherwood Court.

"I have come to you, Mr. Temple," Sir Philip began, as he took the seat offered him, "at the request of Captain Wynterton, in order to acquaint

you with an unfortunate occurrence in which his son is involved. Hubert has lately been associating a great deal with a young Frenchman, a fast, vulgar sort of fellow, about his own age, whose company seemed to have a strong attraction for him, though they were always finding matter for mutual disagreement. To account for my knowing this, I must explain that the rooms I occupy when in London are almost exactly opposite the house in which this Frenchman has taken up his quarters, and that whenever I happen to be so minded, I can without difficulty see almost all that goes on in his sitting-room. You know that in those dull, quiet turnings out of the Strand on the riverside the houses are high, and so near together that one could almost shake hands across the street; it is in one of these, Somers Street, that I live. Well, all last Sunday afternoon I was in-doors on account of a slight indisposition; I had several times noticed Hubert Wynterton leaning out of the window opposite, smoking and talking, when, just as it was growing dark and I had fallen asleep on the sofa, I was startled by the sound of angry voices in hot disputation. I got up, went to the window, and found that my friends opposite had proceeded from words to blows, and were in fact engaged in a hot tussle. Suddenly I saw Hubert draw a revolver from his pocket and discharge it in his antagonist's face. I heard a heavy fall, then all was still. A few moments later Hubert emerged from the house,

pale as ashes, closed the door gently behind him, and walked hurriedly away. As far as I could tell, no one observed him; the street, quiet enough at all times, is on Sunday evenings absolutely empty, and, once in the Strand, he was of course speedily lost in the crowd."

I was appalled at what I heard. For a moment I felt inclined to discredit the whole statement. "This is a very serious matter, Sir Philip," I said, interrupting him; "am I to understand that you bring an accusation of murder against Hubert Wynterton?"

"Whether I do so or not rests with some one else to decide," he rejoined coolly; "permit me, if you please, to continue my story, every detail of which is, I assure you, strictly true." I think his sharp eye had detected a shadow of incredulity on my countenance.

Before he could proceed, one of my clerks entered with a telegram requiring a reply. It was from Captain Wynterton, and ran thus: "*I must see you to-day; shall I go up to town, or will you come down to me?*" I sent word that I would be with him that evening; then, turning to my visitor, "Allow me one question," I said; "if, as you tell me, it was already dark, how could you observe your neighbour's actions so narrowly, and be so certain that it was Hubert who fired the shot?"

"Lighted candles were on the table," he promptly rejoined, "for the two men had been playing cards. I waited a few minutes to

observe whether the people of the house, having heard the report of firearms, would go up to see what had occurred. Finding no one went to the assistance of the wounded man, I took my hat and crossed over to the house; I had to ring twice before a maid-servant came to the door. I asked her if the gentleman upstairs was in, and if he was alone. She replied that she did not know, so I said I would go up and see. On entering the room I found M. Morizot stretched on the floor, bleeding from a bullet-wound in the head, and apparently lifeless. I raised him up and laid him on his bed; then I rang for the servant and despatched her for the nearest doctor. While she was gone I looked round the room; perceiving a handkerchief marked with Hubert's name, I instantly slipped it into my pocket, as well as a cigar-case bearing his initials which lay upon the table beside a bottle of absinthe, a pack of cards, and some cigars. I had just time to place the revolver—one chamber of which had been recently discharged—where it might easily have fallen from the man's own hand before the landlord appeared on the scene, having just come home. It was not difficult to convince him that his lodger, who was evidently regarded with mistrust and the vulgar prejudice which people of that class entertain against foreigners, especially the French, had taken his own life; and once having accepted the idea, he clung to it persistently. The servant, when interrogated,

owned that she had been gossipping in the back-yard with a neighbour, and had heard nothing of what went on in the house. The gentleman had let himself in with a latch-key, so she could not tell whether he was accompanied by any one. The surgeon who had been summoned pronounced life extinct, and said it appeared probable, from the nature of the wound, that it was self-inflicted, the pistol having evidently been discharged close to the head. Meanwhile the landlord had fetched a police-constable, and I gave evidence as to what I had found on entering the room a few minutes previously, carefully abstaining from any mention of what I had observed from the opposite window."

"You mean," I said, "that you gave the impression that you believed it to be a case of suicide?"

"Precisely," he replied; "I had my own reasons for doing so. Thence I went to Hubert's rooms, little expecting to find him in. He was there, however, sitting with his head in his hands, the picture of despair. I told him I had seen all that had occurred. 'The man is dead, Wynterton,' I added, 'and you have killed him.' He looked up at me with speechless horror; I repeated my words. 'Impossible!' he at length exclaimed. 'You must be mistaken, Fletcher. I never meant to do it; it is all my cursed temper! I cannot have killed him; I must go to him! I must go and see if he is really dead!' 'You shall do no such thing,' I said. 'I tell you Morizot *is*

dead; you cannot bring him back to life. The best thing you can do is to get out of the way as fast as possible.'"

"My dear sir," I could not forbear saying, "was not that the very way for Hubert to make himself suspected?"

"Pardon me," Sir Philip replied. "Fortunately for Hubert, he had already told his landlady that he was going home for a few days; it was easy for me to inform her that I had brought bad news which necessitated his immediate departure, and accounted, too, for the state of extreme agitation he was in. Cutting short his lamentations, I put some things together for him, and sent him off, not to Netherwood, but in quite an opposite direction."

"Does Captain Wynterton know all this?" I inquired.

"Most assuredly," answered Sir Philip with an unpleasant smile. "I went down yesterday to acquaint him with the unfortunate occurrence; the poor man is naturally very much cut up about it. But I must ask you to listen to me a few moments longer. Do not suppose that I acted as I did from motives of disinterested kindness, and a simple desire to screen Hubert from exposure and disgrace. I have no particular affection for him; he owes me money, and I dislike peppery youngsters of his stamp, who are perpetually getting into hot water. Nor do I in the slightest degree care for the honour of the family, unless my own is connected with it; but I adore

his handsome sister, and I want her for my wife. I repeat to you what I have already told Captain Wynterton. The option rests with him; if he will consent to give Beatrice to me, I solemnly swear I will never divulge Hubert's guilt in this matter, and should it be discovered in any unforeseen manner, I am prepared to affirm that he was compelled to fire in defence of his own life. Whereas if he refuses me his daughter's hand I will disclose every circumstance connected with the affair, identify the revolver as Hubert's property, produce the handkerchief and cigar-case in proof of his guilt, and make his present hiding-place known to the police."

I looked into my interlocutor's face; it was resolute and reckless. There was a flavour of intimidation in what he said that galled me not a little. "You intend, then, to drive a hard bargain with Captain Wynterton," I observed.

"On the contrary, my proposal appears to me a highly advantageous one," Sir Philip resumed, "and I think Captain Wynterton ought to think himself fortunate in getting the matter hushed up so easily. But I will detain you no longer, Mr. Temple. The inquest is to be held at noon the day after to-morrow, and before that time I must have his decision. If he wishes for my silence let him wire me the words, *Beatrice consents*, and I pledge my honour that no pains on my part shall be spared to avert suspicion from my future brother-in-law. Otherwise justice requires me to take the opposite course."

Then he rose to take leave. "One word, if you please," I interposed. "I understood you to say that Hubert's revolver was left in Morizot's room. Will not that furnish evidence against him?"

"I think not," Sir Philip rejoined, "for I find it has been traced to a maker in the Strand, who remembers selling it a short time since to a dark, foreign-looking gentleman, a description which happily answers as well for Morizot as for Wynterton. In fact, the two were not at all unlike in appearance, and might really have been mistaken for one another by a chance observer who did not notice them very narrowly. Now I will wish you good-morning."

He bowed and withdrew. For some time I sat motionless, thinking how I could best help my unhappy friend. Then I summoned my head clerk, gave him the necessary instructions about some pressing business, and left the office. Before proceeding to the railway terminus, I determined to visit the house where this fatal fray had taken place, and, if possible, ascertain whether all was in accordance with the account I had received.

By means of a liberal largess the landlord was induced to answer my questions; he confirmed all that Sir Philip Fletcher had told me, and had apparently no doubt as to the unfortunate man, whom he described as very strange in his ways, having committed suicide. I hailed a passing hansom, had myself driven over Waterloo Bridge

to the South Western Railway station, and was soon speeding on my way to Netherwood as quickly as an express train could carry me.

It is not necessary to inform the reader that my thoughts during this journey were so absolutely engrossed by the communication recently made to me as to render me unconscious of all that passed around. My sympathy with my friend in the calamity which had so recently overtaken him was intensified by the knowledge I possessed of the miserable secret alluded to in the first part of this story. I say advisedly the *knowledge*, for various trifling circumstances had during the last nineteen years, from time to time arisen to confirm my suspicions, and these, combined as they were with recent occurrences, amounted in my mind to absolute certainty and enabled me to sympathize with Ambrose Wynterton in a way of which he little dreamed. For I knew that the keenest form of human anguish—namely, remorse—was added to his burden of grief; I knew that if he had, at a certain crisis of his life, submitted his will to the will of God instead of rashly endeavouring to take the direction of destiny into his own hands, he might have been spared much if not all that he was now enduring. Nor will this story have been written in vain if it serves to show how hopeless a task it is for man to resist his Maker, since our highest wisdom, as well as our plainest duty, consists in blindly following wherever He sees fit to lead, and passively acquiescing when-

ever He sees fit to speak. But I am anticipating the course of my narrative.

## III.

Scarcely two months had elapsed since I had last seen Netherwood Court; the roses had not ceased to blossom in its gardens, the glory of the summer had not departed from its woods and groves, the birds still sang among its leafy thickets, and yet how changed the scene appeared to me as I once more drove up the familiar avenue! The splendour of an August sunset was flooding the air, and through the spaces between the stately limes I could see the blaze of beauty on the terraces and lawns—the brilliant scarlet of geraniums, the deep ultramarine of salvias, the rosy pink of graceful oleanders, and the creamy white of the royal magnolias which displayed their shining foliage on the west front of the house.

As usual on summer evenings, I found the hall-door open, so I entered unattended, crossed the wide vestibule, and gently pushed back the portals of the library, thinking I might probably find there the master of the mansion. The room was untenanted, however, so I traversed its spacious length and knocked at the door of an inner and much smaller apartment

which Captain Wynterton was in the habit of using as a study. "Come in," said his well-known voice, and in a moment more we were shaking hands.

After a few brief words of greeting, I seated myself by the window, Captain Wynterton remaining standing on the hearthrug. He was the first to break the silence.

"I am so glad you have come, Temple," he said. "You know what trouble I am in?"

"Yes," I replied. "Sir Philip Fletcher was with me this morning; I have heard all."

"What is your opinion?" he asked.

"My opinion is that you are entirely in his power. His conduct is ungenerous, not to use a harsher word."

Captain Wynterton shivered and turned round to the fire, for the evening was somewhat chilly, and some logs were burning on the hearth. The look of misery on his face went to my heart.

"I might have known that boy would be my ruin," he said, speaking with evident effort. "It is my own fault; I have only myself to blame. I may as well tell you at once what has been concealed from you too long: Hubert is not my own child."

I got up and moved to his side, and there was a few moments' pause. "Tell me all about it," I said at length.

Had the announcement come upon me with the force of a startling surprise, I am not sure that I should have been able to repress all out-

ward manifestations of astonishment; but it was merely the confirmation of my long-standing conviction, and I therefore remained perfectly unmoved, to all appearance at least. Captain Wynterton was too completely absorbed to notice my calmness or think it wanted accounting for; perhaps he attributed it to my professional training, for lawyers, like priests and doctors, have many strange tales to hear. He drew forward an arm-chair for me, seated himself in another not far off, and began his recital.

"You remember how passionately I longed for an heir in the early days of my married life. My dear wife often used to check me when I expressed myself too strongly on the subject, reminding me in her gentle way that God knows best what is good for us. It would have been well for me if I had heeded her pious admonitions; but as one year after another went by without bringing any hope of a child, my impatient eagerness increased, until at last I felt that if this one great wish of my heart were denied me I could find no enjoyment in all the numerous blessings God was showering down unceasingly on my thankless head. You know how we went abroad for the sake of my wife's health, and how after some time we had the joyful assurance that God was about to bestow on us the earnestly-coveted gift of a child." He paused, overcome by emotion, and I came to his relief.

"I distinctly recollect the letter in which you

told me you were intending to return to England as soon as possible, in order that the heir might be born at Netherwood. The next time you wrote it was to relate your compulsory halt at Bordeaux, your terrible anxiety about your wife, the boy's birth, and her critical illness." I stopped speaking, and Captain Wynterton resumed his narrative.

"There was an old saying one of our masters used to be fond of quoting when we were at school, '*Satan is complaisant to eager wishers*,' and I am a proof of how fatally true that saying is. To my great grief and disappointment, our son died a few hours after his birth, and his mother's life was despaired of. For more than a week she lay in a state of unconsciousness, while I hung over her in speechless sorrow, fearing each hour would be her last. But one morning the doctor detected a slight improvement, a flicker, as it were, of returning consciousness, and at the close of his visit he told me that what he now most dreaded was the effect which the knowledge of the baby's death might have upon his patient, who was certain to ask for her child in the event of her regaining the power of speech. Then, with the swiftness of lightning, there came upon me the temptation to which, alas! I yielded—the idea of substituting a living child for my own dead one, and thus both providing myself with an heir and sparing the feelings of my wife. The doctor acquiesced at once, for he regarded the question from a purely medical point of view,

and the plan was accordingly carried out. Some people in an humble class of life and in straitened circumstances, to whose family twins had just been added, were induced to part with one of their newly-born sons, and the affair was so cleverly managed that no one except the doctor, the nurse, and myself suspected anything about it. You know my history from that day, so I have nothing more to tell; but you can never know the misery, the remorse, the vain regret which it has been my lot to endure. Only when it was too late did I see what I had done in its true colours; especially when Beatrice was born, and I felt that I had deprived my daughter of her inheritance and robbed her of her birthright, my self-reproach knew no bounds. And now it seems as if I were to be the means of destroying the happiness of her life!"

"Poor Beatrice!" I could not help exclaiming. "I am afraid it is a sad business for her, however it may turn out. Does she know anything yet? Have you told her what Sir Philip's errand was? There is no time to be lost; the inquest on M. Morizot is to be held the day after to-morrow."

I was horror-struck to see the effect of my words. Captain Wynterton turned white to the very lips, grasped the arm of his chair as if for support, and turning towards me with a quick movement, "*What* did you say the man's name was?" he inquired eagerly.

"Morizot," I replied—"Jean-Baptiste Morizot. I saw the name on a letter which had come

for him; the landlord asked me what he was to do with it. I think the post-mark was Lyons. Did you know him, Wynterton?"

"Sir Philip said he was a dark young man about Hubert's age, who had lately come from the south of France," he continued, without heeding my question. "Morizot was the name of Hubert's parents. The curse has come upon me, in truth, for I do believe the unhappy boy has killed his own brother!"

"Impossible!" I exclaimed. But as I uttered the word my heart misgave me, for I remembered what had been said to me that very morning: "*They might be mistaken for one another.*" "The similarity of name is a strange coincidence," I remarked aloud, "but I have known stranger. No doubt there are plenty more families of that name, though it is a peculiar one. I see no reason to conclude that he is even a distant relative."

"I could tell if I saw him," pursued Captain Wynterton, "for I distinctly remember, when the two infants were shown to me, I rejected the one because it had a purple mark on its cheek. Those marks are seldom, if ever, got rid of. Do you happen to know if he had one?"

I was obliged, reluctantly, to own that both Fletcher and the landlord of the lodging-house had mentioned this disfigurement to me. "I knew it!" cried my friend: "Hubert's hand is stained with the blood of his twin-brother! Alas! alas! would that I had died before this disgrace came upon me!"

No words can say how deeply I felt for Ambrose Wynterton as he sat leaning his head on his hand, the large tears rolling down his cheeks. I pressed his hand in silent sympathy. "I do not see that you did do so very wrong in adopting the child, after all," I said at length. "You did it for your wife's sake, from a desire to spare her pain."

"No, no, Temple," he rejoined, looking up; "it is of no use trying to gloss it over or palliate what I did. I interfered with Providence and practised a gross deception. I had set my whole heart on having an heir; nay, more, I determined to have one, and cared not at what cost of honour and principle. Now I must bear the consequences. God knows I am heavily punished!"

"Better be punished in this world than in the next," I said, with a sigh. "But this thing must not be known, the secret must be kept to the end. Besides, we have yet to ascertain whether the man was really Hubert's brother. I cannot take it for granted in the way you do. The matter must be investigated. The first thing to be done is to decide about Sir Philip's proposal, the acceptance or refusal of which involves so much to every one concerned," I concluded, trying to recall the thoughts of my unhappy friend to the business about which I had come down.

He looked up at me with an expression in which humiliation, misery, and remorse were blended in a manner that I cannot attempt to describe. "I sent for you to decide that

question," he replied in a weary tone. "I will tell you what Father Quentin said: I believe his judgment is sound. He advised me to state the case to Beatrice without any attempt to influence or persuade her, and he doubted not she would be willing to make the sacrifice, and I, he said, must be willing to accept it."

"That is exactly what I think," I said with decision, "and I am glad that his opinion so fully coincides with my own. I do not see that you have any room for hesitation, Wynterton. Beatrice is a good girl and devotedly attached to you; she would do anything to spare you sorrow, and I am sure you will have no difficulty in gaining her consent."

"Perhaps not," he rejoined, "but I shrink from letting her know what is required of her. It seems such a shame that this fair young girl in the springtide of happiness should have her whole life blighted for my sake, who am a miserable old man, with one foot, so to speak, in the grave. I cannot bear to think that my child must thus suffer for her father's fault!"

"You forget," I said, "that it is for Hubert's sake, not yours, she will do this. She will see nothing but his guilt and his wrong-doing as having been the means of bringing this misery on us all. Whatever you do, pray do not undeceive her as to the relationship in which she stands to him!"

"No, I will not. Father Quentin warned me to be careful to conceal that secret. Let me tell

you something more he said: he reminded me that God never lays on His children burdens that they cannot bear, nor duties which they have not strength to fulfil; who knows, he added, but that in some way of which we little dream this trial may be lightened for Beatrice?—either some way of escape may be made for her, or, if it come to the worst and she is forced to marry a man who does not scorn to make his own profit out of his friend's misfortunes, her self-sacrifice may be rewarded even in this life, sunshine may once more return after the storm, and her lot be less dark than we are now inclined to fear that it will prove."

"I rejoice to hear that Father Quentin takes so sensible and hopeful a view of the subject," I said. "That ought to encourage and cheer you, my dear friend; do not be so much cast down about this sad affair. There is no doubt as to what is to be done now: Beatrice must be told, for I think I can venture to assert that even in the event of her marrying Sir Philip, as it appears she must, the unhappiness entailed on her can scarcely be as great as that which will inevitably come upon her if matters are left to take their course. I am thoroughly convinced that he will show no mercy, and his evidence will insure a verdict of manslaughter, possibly of wilful murder, against Hubert."

"It would be different if Sir Philip were an absolute stranger," Captain Wynterton said, "though even in that case I am sure Beatrice

could never bring herself to like him; but, as it is, she has a strong aversion to him, and I tell you plainly that I fully share her feeling."

"His conduct in regard to the unfortunate occurrence which has given him so much power over you certainly places his character in no very advantageous light," I replied, "and he cannot be said to be either generous or high-minded. But, on the other hand, you must not forget that you cannot, under existing circumstances, bring yourself to look at him fairly. He is sincerely fond of Beatrice, after his fashion, and if he does not make her really happy, I do not think he will make her miserable. There is one thing against the marriage, however—he is not a Catholic."

"As to that," her father said, "he can scarcely be called a Protestant, at least in the ordinary acceptation of the word, for he told me he had no definite religious beliefs, and no prejudices either. He added that, if Beatrice agreed to marry him, he would at once consent to place himself under instruction with a view to being received into the Church. So that obstacle, at least, is removed. I had better see her at once, I suppose," he concluded, with a sigh.

I noted his pallid and weary face, and the air of exhaustion with which he stretched out his hand to ring the bell. "Not to-night," I said; "it is getting late, and you are evidently tired out. To-morrow will be quite time enough, and you will feel refreshed then, I hope."

He readily assented, glad to delay, even for

a few brief hours, the interview he so much dreaded. I wished him good-night and left him, as I had several letters to write.

Before repairing to my room I turned my steps in the direction of the chapel, and there I found Beatrice kneeling at the feet of an image of Our Lady of Dolours, engaged in saying her beads. "If sorrow is to come upon her, there can be no better preparation for meeting it," I thought, as I knelt beside her and silently joined my prayers to hers.

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## IV.

Well and wisely has it been said that when confronted with an unlooked-for crisis we are what we have made ourselves, since it is repeated action which prepares us for sudden choice.

Beatrice Wynterton's life had hitherto been all sunshine and summer; she had been sheltered from every rough wind and screened from every untoward blast; her path had been strewn with roses, and every pebble likely to wound her delicate feet had been as far as possible removed out of her way. Yet the storm, when it came, did not find her unprepared, nor did it leave her utterly prostrate. For under her soft and girlish

exterior she possessed her father's strength of will, and a high and dauntless courage inherited from the long line of illustrious ancestors to which her mother had belonged. She had, moreover, never breathed any other atmosphere than that of a truly Christian home; for Captain Wynterton had been most careful in the choice of those to whom her education had been confided, and her religious education could not have fallen into better hands than those of Father Quentin. She had already learnt to make duty, not inclination, the guide of her actions, and in all things to consider rather how she might please God than how she might gratify self. She understood the beauty and value of sacrifice, and, by the daily and hourly practice of renunciation in regard to matters so small as often to be imperceptible to the eyes of those around her, she had trained herself both to see clearly what she ought to do, and also to face unflinchingly the consequences of her decision in the painful and trying circumstances in which she was about to be placed. The reader will perhaps deem me partial, and I fully admit that such maturity of mind and character is rarely to be met with in a girl of nineteen. But the portrait of Beatrice is no fancy sketch—it is, on the contrary, taken from real life; she is no imaginary woman, but a creature of flesh and blood, and I think that her conduct will, in the sequel, be found to justify my praise.

The next day was Wednesday, the morning on

which Mass was ordinarily said in the chapel of Netherwood Court, and the whole household was assembled there as usual. My thoughts were naturally a good deal pre-occupied by the interview so soon to be held, and I could scarcely take my eyes from Beatrice and her father. The latter had evidently passed a sleepless night, and I was shocked to see the change which the last two days had made in his appearance. In the clear morning light he looked haggard and broken; he seemed to have suddenly grown twenty years older, and his step, usually so elastic, was slow and weary as he prepared to leave the chapel.

There was not much said during breakfast-time. Captain Wynterton's appetite had forsaken him. Beatrice looked anxious and distressed. From the little that had been told her already, she evidently gathered that something worse was yet to come, and was agitated by the painful suspense in which she was held. When we rose from the table Captain Wynterton beckoned to his daughter to go with him into his study, whither I followed them, feeling certain that my presence, far from being a restraint, would make matters easier for both father and child. Nor was I wrong, for no sooner had the door closed behind us than Captain Wynterton turned to me with the words: "You must tell her, Temple."

"Beatrice," I began, "you know that Hubert has got into trouble, and is consequently obliged to keep out of the way for a time. We would

fain have spared you all further knowledge of his misdeeds, were it not that you, and you alone, can save him from exposure and shield your father's name from public disgrace." Then in as few words as possible I told her what had occurred, without, however, mentioning the price at which Sir Philip's silence might be purchased.

She was horrified at the story. "How dreadful," she exclaimed, "to think that Hubert has actually killed some one! How sorry he must have been when he found the man was really dead! What will become of him? Will he be put in prison and tried for murder?"

"I have told you, my dear child, that it rests in your power to save him from punishment and your father from dishonour."

"It rests in my power?" she repeated. "I do not understand what you mean, Mr. Temple." She looked from me to her father, and as her eyes rested on his dejected countenance, her whole heart seemed to go out towards him in sympathy and love. "Dear father," she said, "if there is anything I can do, tell me at once, and it shall be done."

"Do not promise too rashly, my child," Captain Wynterton interposed: "it involves a great sacrifice on your part."

"Nothing can be a sacrifice that I do for you, papa," she promptly replied. "What do I not owe to you? You have been everything to me, father and mother too; I wish I could spare you all pain and bear this grief instead of you. Be-

sides, Hubert is my brother as well as your son" (here a spasm passed over Captain Wynterton's features); "it is my duty to help him if I can. What is it, Mr. Temple, that I can do or relinquish?"

I fancy the idea that suggested itself to her mind was that of relinquishing her fortune. I own that it cost me an effort to tell this generous, warm-hearted girl what was required of her, but I accomplished my task. She listened in silence; her eyes dropped and her lips quivered. I could see that a struggle, short and sharp, was going on within. Almost mechanically she pulled to pieces a flower she was holding in her hand, and as the bright petals floated slowly to the ground it seemed to me an emblem of the ruthless destruction of her own hopes and dreams of happiness. When she again looked up a change had come over her countenance, as when, on a summer's day, a chill mist suddenly rolls up, blotting out the sun and making the world look dull and gray.

"It is very mean of Sir Philip to trade on our misfortunes, but I will do as he wishes," she said. Then she turned to her father, threw her arms around him, and burst into tears. "He must not take me from you, father dear," she sobbed, burying her face on his breast. "Promise you will stay with me always, always!"

"My darling!" he murmured, fondly stroking her head, "my own sweet child!"

I am a matter-of-fact man of business, but I

confess that my own eyes were not dry as I rose and left the room.

A few hours later the telegraph wires carried to Sir Philip the message he desired to receive, and with the words, "*Beatrice consents*," Hubert was saved from exposure and protected from punishment.

Captain Wynterton appeared completely shattered. The shock he had received on first hearing of Hubert's grievous misconduct, the various emotions which followed, the acute humiliation he endured at finding himself at the mercy of a man whom he disliked, and the bitter pang it cost him to solicit such a sacrifice at the hand of his only and beloved child, were more than his bodily powers were able to endure, and his physical prostration was evidently so great that when he besought me not to leave him, as I was intending to do in order to return to town immediately after luncheon, I felt unable to refuse his request that I would remain until the morrow, supported as it was by the additional plea that he had determined to make a fresh will without delay. So we sat together through the hot summer afternoon, in the study where we had spent so many happy hours, but where I was never to sit again beside the companion of my youth. "God bless you, Temple!" he said, when our business was finished. "God bless and reward you for all you have been to me and mine! No one, surely, had ever a truer or more faithful friend."

I had not long retired to rest that night when I was aroused by a hurried knocking at my door. It was Captain Wynterton's valet. He begged me to come at once to his master, who appeared seriously ill. The doctor, summoned in haste, pronounced the attack to be a severe paralytic seizure, and said that, though his patient might rally, it could only be for a few hours, and that the end was apparently not far off. We kept our vigil by the sufferer's bed, Father Quentin, Beatrice and I, until dawn gave way to sunrise, and sunrise to the brightness of the morning. The broad casement window stood wide open, and the song of birds and the scent of flowers penetrated into the chamber of death, as if to dissipate its gloom and fill it with the presence of life and the promise of joy. At length the Angelus bell rang from the tower of the church Ambrose Wynterton had built in the far-off days when his heart beat high with hope; and, now that he was stretched upon his dying bed, the familiar sound aroused his slumbering senses. Once more be opened his eyes, and, faithful to the pious habit of a lifetime, feebly attempted to make for the last time the sign of our redemption: "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death," we heard him whisper, and then he ceased to breathe.

It was the day appointed for the inquest, and I was only just able to reach London in order to be present at it. Sir Philip Fletcher gave his evidence with ready facility and perfect assurance,

and, nothing being known which could in the least degree suggest Hubert Wynterton's name in connection with the circumstances attending Morizot's death, the jury found no difficulty in returning the verdict usual in such cases, and affirming that he destroyed himself while of unsound mind. They were evidently under the impression that he had lost heavily at cards, and then, in despair at having gambled away his employer's money, had put an end to his existence. One man, somewhat shrewder than the rest, put several awkward questions to Sir Philip as to whether he had seen any one leave the house; but his cool self-possession carried him safely through the danger, and the manner in which he told how his slumber had been disturbed by the report of fire-arms, and how he had rushed across the street to find the house empty and deserted, was truthful enough to carry conviction to any mind. The inquiries I subsequently caused to be made in regard to Morizot, who had come over to England on business connected with a Lyons firm in whose employ he was, established beyond a doubt the melancholy fact that Hubert had, unawares, incurred the guilt of fratricide.

When the funeral was over I communicated to Hubert and Beatrice, in the presence of Father Quentin, the last wishes of Captain Wynterton as contained in the will which, with a presentiment, I believe, of his approaching end, he had so recently instructed me to draw up. The shock to Beatrice was naturally very great, and her

grief even more bitter than that occasioned by her father's death, for it is less painful to part from those we love than to sever ourselves from our ideal of them. She had so profoundly loved and reverenced her father that she could not bear to think him less than perfect, and, though she would neither blame him herself nor allow any one else to do so, it was not difficult to see how her honourable and sensitive nature recoiled from the thought of the deceit he had practised. The only form in which she gave open expression to her feelings was that of intense sympathy for the mental suffering he must have undergone, and of eager anxiety that the secret of Hubert's real origin should be for ever buried in the grave of her beloved parent. On this point I reassured her, and thought it wiser to spare her all knowledge of the relation in which poor Morizot had stood to Hubert, as also of the amount of the latter's debts and the extent of his misdoings.

The reader already knows that Hubert was no favourite of mine, but I am in fairness bound to confess that his conduct on the present occasion was such as to change my long-standing dislike into pitying compassion. He was so penitent, so humble, so repentant, so full of sorrow for all his misdeeds, and for the manner in which they had hastened, if not occasioned, the death of his adoptive father. He acquiesced without a murmur when he found himself disinherited, considering the loss of the estate to be—as in fact it was—the due punishment of the fatal act in which all

his wrong-doing had culminated, and he declared himself willing to carry out Captain Wynterton's desire that he should in future reside out of England. On this condition his debts were to be paid, and he was moreover to have a thousand pounds down, besides an allowance of five hundred pounds a year for his life.

"It is surprising how much good one often finds where one least expects it," I remarked to Father Quentin when the painful interview was over.

"Yes," he replied, "Hubert's character is a weak one; he is passionate and impulsive, and has altogether failed to acquire self-control."

"It is deplorable," I rejoined, "to think he should have gone so far astray, when we remember that he is not yet twenty-one. Do you think he will really reform? I am afraid his present mood will too soon pass away."

"He is humble, and therefore I have hope of him," the charitable priest answered, "and even at his worst he did not altogether abandon the practice of his religion, though he has, I fear, been sadly careless and remiss. The longer I live the more convinced am I that there are no sins so fatal as pride and apostasy, and it is these which, as a rule, prepare the way for final impenitence."

I must add that subsequent events proved the correctness of Father Quentin's view of the case. Hubert settled on a sheep-farm in the neighbourhood of Buenos Ayres, and when last I heard of

him he was leading a quiet, steady life, and altogether doing very well.

Sir Philip Fletcher undoubtedly desired to marry Beatrice for her own sake, but it cannot be supposed that he became less eager to secure her hand now that she was the mistress of Netherwood. He behaved extremely well, however, and showed both consideration for her feelings and deference to her wishes. Though deeply in love with her, he readily assented to her proposal that the marriage should be postponed for a year, an interval which she intended to pass in complete retirement, under the roof of a widowed sister of the Mr. Newburgh whose name has already been mentioned in these pages. This lady, who owned a small estate in the lowlands of Scotland, had offered Beatrice a temporary home in her house.

But man proposes and God disposes. In the following spring Sir Philip was thrown from his horse while out hunting, sustaining severe injuries, from the effects of which he died about three weeks afterwards. He had fulfilled his promise of placing himself under instruction, and was, I believe, received into the Church in his last hours.

Thus Beatrice found herself without claims of duty, ties of kindred, or anything that could prevent her from carrying out the desire she had secretly cherished ever since the death of her father, and devoting her life to prayer, penance, and expiation. She therefore caused the Neth-

erwood estate to be sold, and out of the proceeds of the sale placed in the hands of trustees a sum sufficient to yield a yearly interest of five hundred pounds, and thus furnish the income allotted to Hubert. After founding Masses in perpetuity for the souls of her father and mother, Sir Philip Fletcher, and Jean-Baptiste Morizot, the victim of Hubert's violence, she arranged that the whole remainder of the purchase-money, with the exception of the amount required for her dowry, should be made over to the bishop of the diocese, and thus restored to the Church, in the event of her remaining in the convent where she purposed trying her vocation. She had always had a great devotion to St. Teresa, and a strong attraction to the venerable and illustrious order of Mount Carmel, and she finally decided to enter a convent of that order in Spain, over which a sister of her mother was at the time ruling as prioress.

After the lapse of rather less than two years I found myself, towards the close of a brilliant summer day, ascending one of a range of hills which are situated in a picturesque and beautiful district of Spain. It was my first visit to that land of romance, and my rapturous admiration caused not a little amusement to Father Quentin, who was my companion on this occasion, and was himself well acquainted with the country, having been in his earlier days professor in the College of Valladolid.

"You seem to fancy you have found the earthly paradise," he said with a smile, "and certainly this road is steep and rugged enough to be the path to heaven!"

As we gradually ascended, the prospect became more and more enchanting; beyond the hills lay mountains, beautiful in form and clothed with pine-forests to their summit, while on one side the view was terminated by the Sierra Nevada, a splendid mass, towering above all the subordinate objects in regal majesty, while the rays of the setting sun tinged the eternal snow. Our path lay through groves of olives and oranges, through woods of cypress and ilex, here and there skirting or crossing a clear and crystal stream, while from time to time the sound of a bell, made soft and musical by distance, was heard from some village church. When at length we reached our destination and rang at the outer gate of a convent which is situated on the summit of a hill, nothing could be more beautiful than the view which was unfolded to our gaze, and in spite of my fatigue I felt almost sorry that we had no further to go.

Beatrice Wynterton was to be professed on the morrow, and it was in order to assist at the ceremony that Father Quentin and I had journeyed southwards. Being an accomplished Spanish scholar, he was able to accede to her earnest request and preach on the occasion. I think no one who heard that sermon could ever forget it, or cease to remember how the holy

priest poured forth the treasures of his matured wisdom and fervent piety, as he spoke, in terms which moved all hearts, of the necessity of suffering, its merit, and its glorious reward. "Ere long," he said in conclusion, "our Lord will say to each of His faithful servants, whether toiling in the world and bearing 'the burden of the day and the heats,' or hidden from the eye of man in the solemn seclusion of the cloister: 'My child, long enough thou hast carried the cross; now is the time for the crown.'"

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Beatrice prostrated herself on the pall of brown serge, while the nuns chanted the *Te Deum*. The last notes died away and she lay prostrate still; nor, prompt though she had ever been to answer to the call of duty and respond to the voice of obedience, did she rise when commanded to do so. In that supreme moment, the consummation, as it were, of her sacrifice, God had taken her to Himself. She was already numbered with His saints in glory everlasting.

# Answered at Last.

## I.

It was the end of October, and there were very few people in London, and, callers being in consequence not very numerous at my office, I imagined that I should find no difficulty in getting away early on a certain Friday morning in order to proceed to an out-of-the-way corner of England, where business required my presence. Unfortunately, just as I was preparing to start, one of my clients, who happened to be passing through town, came to consult me upon a matter of urgent importance. He was, moreover, a person to whom, on account of his advanced age and high social standing, it would have been impossible in any case to refuse an interview; and hence it came to pass that when at length he took his leave I found that it was barely possible for me to catch the midday express. I promised the cabman double fare if he would take me to Paddington in time, but it was of no use, and I arrived at the Great Western terminus only to hear the faint shriek of the departing engine. This was annoying, but there was nothing to be done, so I sent off a telegram

to inform Mr. Moreland, the gentleman at whose house I was expected, that I could not arrive until the last train, the only other one which stopped at the little station where I had to alight. Having despatched my message, I purchased a supply of newspapers, hoping to while away not too wearily the time which must perforce elapse before I could begin my journey.

It was not a romantic journey, nor one which could be considered interesting in any way. I was accustomed to make such very frequently; for I belonged at that period of my life to a leading firm of London solicitors, and sometimes hardly a week passed without my having to run down to one part of the country or another to transact business on behalf of some client. My present errand took me to Darnesfield Court, a solitary country-house situated at a short distance from a small village in the west of England. It did not belong to Mr. Moreland, but he had taken it for a year in order to be near his only daughter, who had recently married a gentleman whose property was situated in the neighbourhood. Since the death of her mother this daughter had been her father's constant friend and companion; thus he naturally felt lonely without her, especially as he was an old man and his sons were all out in the world.

The hour for starting came at last, and as we steamed slowly out of the station, far indeed was I from anticipating the startling spectacle of which I was to be the involuntary witness before

many more hours had gone by. If I now write down the singular story—the most singular I have ever met with in the course of my experience, professional or otherwise—it is in the hope not merely of interesting the reader for the space of a brief half-hour, but of convincing him, in these days when it is the fashion openly to deny the supernatural, or else practically to leave it out of sight altogether, that not only does the Creator govern in a general and more extended sense the course of events in the world which He has made, but that every occurrence in the life of each individual is permitted or appointed by an over-ruling Providence, and forms a part of the vast system by means of which His divine and beneficent purposes are furthered and carried out.

In due time I found myself at Westhampton, where Mr. Moreland's dog-cart was awaiting me. The night was very dark, so dark as to necessitate extreme caution on the part of the servant who was driving; and, what with the slowness of the pace and the coldness of the weather—for it was unusually cold for the time of the year—the distance from the station seemed to have extended itself, and the way appeared longer and lonelier than I could have imagined a four miles' drive along a country road could possibly be. The clock of the adjacent church was striking eleven as we drew up before the door of Darnesfield Court, and the light and warmth of the hospitable mansion were very

welcome to me as I entered the hall. Jarvis, the butler, received me with polite apologies. "Master hopes you will excuse his having gone to bed, sir," he explained; "he was very tired this evening, and is, besides, in the habit of always retiring early. But supper is quite ready, if you will please to walk into the library."

I followed him with alacrity. The well-lighted room looked the picture of cheerful comfort, and the nicely-arranged supper-table bore a most inviting aspect. I told Jarvis I did not need his services, so he quitted the apartment and I began my meal without delay. It was quickly concluded, and I pushed back my chair and got up with the intention of ringing the bell; but I was sleepy and tired, and the temptation presented by a comfortable easy-chair which stood beside the bright wood fire proved too strong for me. I paused, sat down, and in less than five minutes was sound asleep, profoundly oblivious of the interests of Jarvis, who was probably quite as sleepy as I was. My slumbers, as I afterwards found, must have lasted about half an hour. They certainly would not have been as peaceful as they were, had I dreamt of what was to follow. Some slight noise, I know not of what nature, having aroused me, I rose from my seat, and before winding up my watch I proceeded to compare it with the timepiece on the mantel-shelf. Having done this, I replaced it in my waistcoat pocket and took out my pipe, which I was about to fill when all at once the door was

unceremoniously burst open, and a girl rushed into the room, followed closely by a man, who caught hold of her round the waist. I can see it all now as if it were yesterday—the look of horror in her dilated eyes, the agonized gesture which seemed to entreat for mercy, the uplifted hands, the pleading lips, the wild despair with which she cowered before her murderer. Yes, her *murderer;* for in another moment the man had drawn a dagger from the pocket of his coat and plunged it into her breast. All this passed, I need hardly say, in less time than it takes me to write these lines, and the moment I beheld her fall forwards to the ground I sprang to the door with the double object of procuring assistance for the victim, should she still be within the reach of aid, and also of securing the assassin.

"Jarvis, Jarvis!" I called as I passed through the open door, which I closed behind me—"Jarvis, where are you? For Heaven's sake come at once!"

"Yes, sir, coming directly," said that functionary placidly and sleepily, as he emerged from a door which led to the lower regions. But when he caught sight of me the expression of his face changed.

"There is murder going on in the library!" I gasped out. We paused an instant at the door: the silence of death seemed to reign within. Then I cautiously turned the handle, and, looking in, we saw—no trace whatever of the

horrors I had just witnessed! The room was exactly as it had been when I sat down to supper; both the intruders had entirely disappeared, and there was not even one single spot of blood upon the carpet. Murderer, victim, dagger, every trace of the crime, had vanished into air; and as I related to the servant the scene I had just witnessed, I saw from his countenance that he received the tale with a mixed feeling of incredulity and contempt.

"There are no ghosts in this house, sir," he said when I stopped speaking—"at least I never heard of any. I made all the doors fast, too, an hour or more ago, and no one could have passed through the hall without my seeing him. There is no young lady in the house at present, either, nor any gentleman, except yourself and master. So you see, sir, you must have been dreaming," he wound up in a triumphant and conclusive tone—the tone of a man who has proved a fact even to demonstration.

I knew quite well, as well as I do at the moment I am writing, that I had not been dreaming, that I never was more thoroughly awake than I was when an involuntary witness of the spectacle I have just described. I could, therefore, only suppose that some terrible crime had in time past been committed in the library, and that this fact furnished an explanation of the apparition I had beheld. However, I felt the butler had the best of me, and the feeling was not an agreeable one.

"Show me my room, please," I said in as unconcerned a tone as I could assume, and I followed the man upstairs to the apartment assigned to my use. He lit the candles upon the dressing-table, wished me good-night, and left me. But I suppose few of my readers will be surprised to hear that it was long before I could attempt going to bed.

I sat down before the fire and began to think. No house could be less weird, uncanny, and suggestive of ghosts than Darnesfield Court. I had seen many country-houses, but never did I meet with one more prosy, practical, and suggestive of solid, every-day comfort. There was no touch of romance or sentiment about it; it was painfully and pitilessly matter-of-fact, both inside and out. There was no ruined tower, half-clothed in ivy, no moat where stately swans could swim at their leisure; there were no secret staircases, no winding passages, no hidden rooms cleverly contrived between massive walls. It was just such a house as every one must have seen twenty times over—solid, substantial, built of red brick, with a large gravelled space in front. The family to which it belonged had preserved the faith even among the worst storms of persecution, and the present owner was a man distinguished for virtue and piety, having erected the beautiful little church which adjoined his grounds in order to provide for the spiritual wants of the increasing number of Catholics in the neighbourhood, many of them converts

whom the teaching and example of the admirable priest who acted as his chaplain had led to seek admission into the true fold. But all this formed no adequate reason for rejecting the idea that the mansion was haunted—an idea which shaped itself all the more definitely in my brain the longer I mused upon the subject.

It was three o'clock in the morning before I lay down to seek repose, and I did not fall asleep until the Angelus, sounding from the tower of the church, told me that a new day had begun.

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## II.

The breakfast hour at Darnesfield Court was fashionably late, for the simple reason that the present master of the house did not, as he was wont to confess with outspoken frankness, really know what to do with his time. I was not quite ready when the gong sounded, and as I slowly descended the broad staircase and crossed the spacious hall on my way to the dining-room I acknowledge that I felt somewhat uncomfortable, for I knew that the butler would have been beforehand with me in acquainting his master with the story of the last night's apparition.

Although my host received me with the utmost courtesy, there was a slight constraint perceptible

in his manner, and I knew in a moment, as I shook hands with him, that my surmise was correct, and he had already been made acquainted with the singular occurrence of the previous night. He eyed me somewhat curiously, but did not broach the subject that was evidently uppermost in his mind until I began to speak of it.

"Did you know that this house was haunted, Mr. Moreland?" I inquired, as I took an egg from its resting-place beneath the snowy napkin.

"O dear no!" was his ready reply. "Nor can I believe it to be so, either. It is not a very old house, and had I had any suspicion that it was haunted I should on no consideration have taken it, for I have the greatest dislike to that sort of thing."

"Well," I rejoined, "how, then, can you explain what I witnessed last night?" And I related in detail the incident which is already known to the reader, and to which my host listened attentively. But I saw that he regarded it as the delusion of a disordered brain.

"It must have been an optical illusion," he remarked sententiously when I had concluded—"a very singular optical illusion, no doubt. I have recently read a book on the subject, a most interesting book. When the nerves of the eye—"

"An optical illusion!" I broke in. "Indeed that is impossible; I am not an imaginative or fanciful man. There never was any one less excitable or more prosy than myself. Pray do not talk to me about illusions. The thing was

no mere fancy; I saw it all as plainly as I now see you."

"Well," he resumed, "then you must have been dreaming; dreams are very real sometimes. What with the motion of the train and the drive through the night-air, no doubt you felt sleepy. I dare say something you had been reading, some tale of horrors, may be, or perhaps some criminal case you may have been engaged in getting up lately, recurred to your mind in rather a startling manner just as you were about to awake."

"Nothing of the sort," I answered, not without some warmth. "I assure you, my dear sir, I was as fully awake as I am now. I can assert it most emphatically. The door was burst open, and I heard as well as saw the two rush in."

Mr. Moreland looked down, and a somewhat peculiar smile played upon his lips. I felt that I was in danger of losing my temper, but checked the irritable impulse and said, with a forced attempt at jocularity: "You will tell me next that I had an attack of delirium tremens!"

To my surprise my host rejoined with grave politeness: "I need not say that I could not have ventured to hint at such a thing, if the suggestion had not come from yourself; but I hope, my dear Mr. Furnival, that you will not be offended if I proceed to add that this is an alternative that strikes me as by no means an impossible one. As you are no doubt aware, all the best medical authorities agree that delirium

tremens may be brought on by want of sleep or an undue stress laid on the brain, though in the vast majority of cases it arises from indulgence in alcoholic drinks. Every one knows how hard you work, and my butler tells me that you drink no wine, so you cannot take offence at what I have said."

I bowed, and Mr. Moreland continued: "I wish I had been downstairs myself; I ought to have been there to receive you. It is high time that I apologized for not having done so. The truth is, I am an old man, and I had ridden a good many miles in the morning and was tired. Besides, I thought your train would be late. The last train generally is behind time."

Here a welcome interruption was created by the entrance of a servant, who informed his master that the solicitor with whom I was to confer respecting the transfer of some property had already arrived from the county town, and was waiting in the library. But though no more was then said on the subject, I could not get it out of my thoughts all day; and I must confess that I found the business I had come down to arrange more wearisome than business had ever been before, and that I got through it far more slowly than is my wont, and did not succeed as readily as I usually do in making either my client's wishes or my own ideas clear to my fellow-lawyer.

The next day was Sunday, and Father Hubert the parish priest, dined at the Court, according

to a long established and invariable custom, with which Mr. Moreland, who was himself an excellent Catholic of the good, old-fashioned type, had no inclination to interfere. The conversation, as was natural, reverted to the subject of the apparition. Father Hubert had heard a garbled account of the matter from some of the villagers to whom Jarvis had been talking, and he listened with much interest to the story I told him. He said that he had never heard of any ghost in connection with the house, which was scarcely a hundred years old, adding that there was nothing in the history of its owner which could seem to point, however remotely, in the direction of a mysterious tragedy, much less of a terrible crime. Despite all that was said, my own conviction remained unshaken that the apparition was a real one; but I felt that I was considered to be the victim of a strange hallucination—one of those delusions to which an active and overworked brain renders many persons liable.

On the Monday I was engaged to shoot over the well-stocked preserves of an old college-friend, whose country-seat was about twelve miles from Darnesfield. I was to remain to dinner, driving back afterwards to Mr. Moreland's as I had to return to town by the first train on Tuesday morning. It was a relief to me to turn my back upon the house, which I believed to be haunted; and as, after an early and solitary breakfast, I drove rapidly away in

the direction of Lancaster Park, my spirits rose with every mile I left behind me. They would, perhaps, have scarcely been so elastic had I known whom I was to see before the day was done!

As almost all the guests, excepting those who were staying in the house, came from a distance, the dinner-hour had been fixed for half-past six. Country dinner-parties are apt to be rather dull affairs, and this one proved no exception to the rule. It was not a brilliant gathering which assembled in the drawing-room. My hosts, the Lancasters, were typical specimens of a country gentleman and his wife, and there were several people exactly like them, only older or younger, graver or gayer, as the case might be. Of one of the persons who composed the company I had scarcely a glimpse until we were all seated at table, as whilst we were in the drawing-room she had her back turned to me, and was engaged in conversing with a tall, thin man, who, standing before her, bent on her glances of unmistakable admiration.

"That is Mr. Somerset," Mrs. Lancaster explained to me in an undertone—"a younger brother of Sir Edward Somerset, the proprietor of Darnesfield; and the young lady he is talking to is a Miss Rutherford. He is desperately in love with her, but I fancy her heart is bestowed elsewhere"

Mr. Somerset took Miss Rutherford in to dinner; they were opposite to me, rather lower

down the table, and after the first glance I directed towards her I seemed to see no one else. My whole attention was riveted upon her, and I could scarcely take my eyes from her face. She was exceedingly pretty; yet it was not her beauty that fascinated me—for I had seen many more beautiful women—but to my utter amazement I recognized in her the girl whom I had seen murdered in the library of Darnesfield Court. There she sat in her youthful freshness and innocent enjoyment, chattering gaily to her admirer; but it was impossible to be mistaken as to her identity. I looked and looked again, gazed and gazed once more, and every time I became more thoroughly and utterly convinced that I was right. She was simply dressed in a gown of soft, pale pink material, cut square at the neck; and in her corsage and in her hair she wore some delicate-hued, late-flowering natural roses, which heightened the effect of her exquisite complexion and dark brown eyes.

Truly, she had not much in common with the agonized, scared, terror-stricken woman whom I had seen cowering before the uplifted dagger; and yet I could recognize each feature: the shape of her face, the turn of her figure, the very form of her hands—everything about her, in fact, was the same. The identity was undeniable, indisputable. I grew absent and distracted, so that the prosy dowager to whom it was my duty to talk, finding me rather a dull companion, addressed herself in preference to a simpering

captain of dragoons who sat on her other hand.

As soon as the ladies quitted the dining-room I excused myself to Mr. Lancaster on the plea that I was tired after my day in the open air, and begged him to allow me to take my departure at once, especially as I had to be back in London at so early an hour the next morning. So the dog-cart was brought round, and I returned to Darnesfield Court, astonishing Mr. Moreland not a little by my unexpected appearance.

"Why, Mr. Furnival," he exclaimed, "I did not expect to see you for a long time yet! Do you know that it is only nine o'clock? What is the matter? Are you ill? You have not seen another ghost, surely!"

"No, I have not seen a ghost," I replied gravely; "I have seen the lady."

"The lady! What lady?"

"Why, the lady I saw in the library the other evening; the bodily form of the phantom-shape I saw in the apparition."

My host removed his cigar from his lips with an impatient gesture. "I do wish," he exclaimed almost pettishly, "you could get that nonsense out of your head. Do you mean to say you have seen it over again? Pray, where did it happen this time? In the drive or out on the open road?"

"You do not understand me," I said, as I seated myself by the fire. "I do not say that I have seen the tragedy acted over again, but I

have seen one of the *dramatis personæ*. She sat opposite to me at dinner. I recognized her at once; there is no possible doubt about it. She is a handsome girl, with beautiful hair, and rather a peculiar manner of parting her lips when she smiles. Her name is Miss Rutherford."

At this point it was evident from the expression of Mr. Moreland's face that he began to entertain serious doubts of my sanity. "Whatever are you talking about?" he cried, startled out of his usual serenity. "You cannot mean Marian Rutherford; she is my daughter's great friend. They are like sisters. Are you going to tell me she is murdered?"

"On the contrary," I replied, "did you not hear me say that she was at Mr. Lancaster's house to-night, and that I sat opposite to her at the dinner-table? She is as much alive as you or I; but, bright and blooming as she is, she is none other than the girl who rushed into the library the other night, white and scared and terrified, pursued by her murderer."

"What a very singular thing," Mr. Moreland remarked, "that you should have taken up this idea! You are the last man I should have suspected of such vagaries. And now that your delusion has taken this personal turn, the matter has gone quite beyond a joke. One thing I really must beg of you, and that is, not to breathe a word of this to any one. Suppose it got round to Miss Rutherford, how extremely unpleasant it would be for her and all of us! No; the ghost-

story has got wind, and has no doubt by this time received innumerable additions, but what you have just mentioned to me must not go any further."

I promised secrecy, and Mr. Moreland continued: "Miss Rutherford is an orphan and my ward, for she has no near relatives living. I am very fond of her, and should be glad to see her suitably married; but I am afraid that her marriage can hardly be a happy one if she perseveres in keeping to her present engagement. Between ourselves, I should only be too glad to see it broken off, and am using all my influence to induce her to give up her intended husband, who is handsome and fascinating, and that sort of thing, but not the sort of man a girl should trust herself to for life. He is a Spaniard of good family; his parents settled in Mexico before he was born. I am afraid he is addicted to one or two very bad habits, besides having a fiery and unrestrained temper. But he can be charming when he chooses, and has a great hold over Marian, who is deeply attached to him, though she deplores his want of principle."

Thus the old man continued to run on, and, as I plainly perceived the subject of the apparition to be an unwelcome topic, I let it drop, and soon afterwards we parted for the night. As I lay down to rest I could not help wondering what was the import of the strange spectacle I had witnessed, and why I had been permitted to behold it. *Cui bono?* I said to myself over and over again; for

as the reader will readily understand, the matter was now invested with an additional and far deeper interest, since one of the phantom actors had been seen by me as a living reality. Was I to see the other also? And if so, when and where would the meeting take place?

On rising the next morning I found that a dense, damp fog had succeeded to the brilliant autumnal sunshine of the preceding day; and when, after a hurried breakfast, I bade farewell to Mr. Moreland and drove away from his door, I felt that the mist which shrouded the landscape in its veil of gloom was not thicker or more impenetrable than the mystery connected with Marian Rutherford and the scene in the library. Had that mystery some undiscoverable relation to a long-forgotten past? Or might it possibly contain a foreshadowing of a yet unimagined future? Had it been shown to me for some hidden purpose which at present I could not divine, but which in due time would be revealed to me?

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## III.

Never have I been able to account to myself for the uncontrollable impulse which prompted me, one dreary afternoon about two months subsequent to my visit to Darnesfield Court, to return home from my office on foot, especially as

the weather was not pleasant enough to furnish an inducement for departing from my almost invariable custom of travelling by omnibus.

On the occasion of which I speak I had walked down Oxford Street, transacting some trifling business on the way, and then directed my steps homewards. When I reached Hyde Park the crowd of carriages, and indeed of vehicles of every description, was greater than usual, and, habituated though I am to thread my way between menacing coal-wagons and dive with dexterity beneath the heads of advancing cab-horses, I was obliged to wait several minutes before I was able to cross the road. I was looking impatiently around me, thinking how foolish I had been to take this long walk on a gusty, disagreeable day, and feeling certain that I should be caught in the rain before I could reach my home, when all at once my attention was forcibly arrested and my roving thoughts were brought to a sudden standstill. Close to my right hand, on the curbstone where I was standing, I became aware of the presence of a gentleman whose face was strangely familiar to me. He was tall and handsome, with curly black hair and regular, finely-cut features. But though his appearance was decidedly striking, I could not at first remember where I had seen him before. At that moment there was an opportunity for crossing the road; we traversed it side by side, and as I looked again at the stranger the truth flashed upon me with the force and

directness of an intuition—he was the phantom murderer of Darnesfield Court! Without thinking why I did so, I followed the mysterious unknown as with rapid, active steps he walked on, shaping his course in a slanting direction so as finally to emerge from the Park opposite Exhibition Road.

Down this road he went until he came to the Post-office, which is situated on the right-hand side; there he paused, and, availing himself of the shelter afforded by the roofing over the street—for it was now raining fast—stood still for a moment under the gas-lamp, and, putting his hand into the breast-pocket of his overcoat, took out, with a quick gesture only too well remembered by me, not this time a dagger, but a packet of letters, which, after a rapid survey, he slipped into the box. I had gone up quite close to him, under pretence of consulting the clock, and before walking away he turned and suddenly looked me in the face. His eyes met mine, and I felt more than ever certain of his identity. He went down the road as far as it goes, then, turning to the left, walked past the church of the Oratorian Fathers, stopping at a house a little further on, the door of which he opened with a latch-key, thus proving that he lived there. A card with *Apartments for Gentlemen* told me that it was a lodging-house; and it was not difficult on the following day to ascertain his name. It was Del Mar, the landlady informed me—Mr. Alfonso Del Mar; and she

added that he was a Spaniard. "I might have guessed that," I said to myself; "he has the look of a haughty hidalgo." As I walked away it suddenly occurred to my mind that Mr. Moreland had said that the gentleman to whom Miss Rutherford was engaged was Spanish. Could it be possible that her present lover was identical with what I could not but suppose to be her future murderer? The truth must be discovered; I wrote immediately to Mr. Moreland—ostensibly for some other object—and in his reply he informed me that my surmise was correct, and that Del Mar was the name of Miss Rutherford's affianced husband.

The reader will not need to be told that this indentification of the principal actor in the tragedy I had witnessed furnished me with a subject for long and serious thought and for mature and anxious deliberation. I hesitated as to what course of action it was best to take, or whether it would not be better to abstain from action altogether, since I could think of none that would do any good. With Mr. Moreland there was manifestly nothing to be done, since he had shown himself determined not to take the matter up, and I knew that if I persisted in urging him to do so he would only grow angry with me and tell me in plain terms that I must be a madman. Ought I to acquaint Miss Rutherford with the whole story, with a view to warning her before it should be too late and her life irretrievably linked with that of Mr. Del Mar? But then

there was my promise of secrecy, and if I were to break it, and she believed me, either in part or whole, I should probably only make her miserable and myself disliked; for what girl ever consented to give up a lover on the stength of such testimony as I could bring forward as to the danger involved in a marriage with him? And if, on the other hand, I said to myself, she refused altogether to give credit to my story, I should not fail to bring down upon myself an amount of ridicule and contempt which I felt hardly prepared to encounter.

Therefore, after much hesitation and manifold reflections, I finally decided to keep silence; and when, a few months subsequently, I heard, not without a sense of relief, that Marian's engagement was broken off, I considered my resolution to have been a wise one, and the subject of the apparition became less frequently present to my thoughts, and as time went on, gradually faded from them altogether.

About twelve months later, indeed, the impression was to a certain extent renewed, for I happened incidentally to be told that Miss Rutherford was dead, and that circumstances of a peculiarly melancholy and mysterious nature were connected with her death. What these circumstances were I was unable fully to ascertain, as my informant only knew that the unfortunate young lady had been found dead, and that the matter had been hushed up, as there was a strong suspicion pointing in the

direction of suicide. Of Mr. Moreland I had lost sight altogether, and my own life was just then so full of sorrow and anxiety that the cares and labours of the present quickly effaced the recollection of my vision—that most weird and mysterious among my memories of the past.

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## IV.

I am not engaged in writing my own autobiography, and it would be alien to the purpose of the present story were I to attempt to narrate the chain of circumstances by means of which I found myself, after an interval of ten or twelve years, an inmate of the accident ward belonging to a large hospital in one of the principal towns of Australia. A compound fracture of one of my lower limbs necessitated a somewhat lengthened period of repose, and the enforced captivity proved very irksome to me. Slowly and wearily the weeks dragged by, until I was at length pronounced convalescent, and it wanted but two or three days to the time fixed for my quitting the hospital, when one evening a man who was a stranger in the place was brought into the ward, having been seriously

hurt in the course of a drunken quarrel with some rough associates in a tavern.

The bed next to mine happening to be vacant, the new-comer was placed in it; his injury was pronounced by the doctor to be severe, but not necessarily mortal. It was of such a nature as to leave the sufferer in full possession of his consciousness, as I presently discovered; for, in the stillness of the night, the patient, being in too great pain to sleep, commenced talking to himself in an undertone. Perhaps he was unaware that he was speaking aloud, or perhaps he imagined that, as he spoke Spanish, no one of those around, if they chanced to overhear, could understand what he said. However, since that language is perfectly familiar to me, I could understand every word he uttered—every word, that is, which reached my ears; for frequently the sick man's mutterings became inaudible, or intervals of slumber on my own part rendered me for a time oblivious of my surroundings. On the whole, I slept but little, however; for, listening at first from mere idle curiosity, I soon found my interest excited in no small degree, for it was manifest that the Spaniard was a prey to remorse on account of some crime, the recollection of which lay heavily on his mind and caused him poignant regret. What was the nature of that crime his self-communings did not disclose, but I gathered that it was an act of violence, connected in some way with my own country; for as his thoughts

apparently travelled back over by-gone years, he constantly mentioned English scenes and English people, some of whose names were familiar to me and seemed to evoke dim memories of a long-forgotten past. Was it a dream, or was it something the sick man said as he tossed restlessly from side to side, that gave definite form to those shadowy reminiscences, and recalled to my mental sight with startling vividness a tragedy to which for years my thoughts had not reverted, but which could never be entirely effaced from my remembrance—namely, the mysterious phantom-scene it had been my lot to behold in the library of Darnesfield Court? The scene, the actors, rose up before me as if all were being enacted over again then and there; and at the same time a suspicion started up within my mind—a suspicion which gradually strengthened into conviction and forced itself upon me with irresistible power—that the sufferer at my side was the Spanish gentleman to whom Miss Rutherford had been engaged, and that it was by his hand that she had come to her untimely end. Thus, by one of those remarkable coincidences in which we should find it difficult to believe, did they not so constantly occur, I was now brought into immediate proximity with the man who had committed the crime that I had seen in anticipation.

The next morning my first thought was the desire to gain sight of the individual who so

deeply interested me; but on looking anxiously towards his bed, I perceived that he had fallen into a heavy sleep, and, his countenance being averted from me, it was impossible to obtain a glimpse of his features—a glimpse which would either go to corroborate the truth of my surmise or prove my suspicions to be unfounded. On my inquiring his name of the nurse, to my surprise she said that it was Albert Davis. Then, seeing the puzzled expression on my face she added: "He does not look much like an Englishman, certainly."

I could now move about with the aid of a stick, and therefore as soon as I was dressed I went to my neighbour's bedside. One glance sufficed to convince me that I had guessed aright; supposition became certainty as soon as my eyes fell on the face of the Spaniard, in whom, changed, care-worn, prematurely aged as he was, no one could fail to recognise the actor in that dark drama, the proud and passionate Del Mar. There was the same black curly hair, there were the same finely-cut features, the same peculiar lower lip, which gave a haughty, almost ill-tempered expression to the countenance, though the cheek was now flushed with fever, and the naturally lustrous eyes sparkled with an unnatural brilliancy. I asked the sick man how he was, adding that I was sure he had been in pain in the night. He looked surprised at being addressed in Spanish, and answered in the same language.

"A thousand thanks," he said, with the courtesy of his nation. "I could not sleep, it is true, but my wound is slight; I shall soon recover."

After a few commonplace remarks, and the proffer of my services if I could be of any use to him, I asked, Had he not lived in England?

An expression of pain passed over the stranger's face; with a slight moan he turned away, closing his eyes wearily as he uttered the monosyllabic reply "yes."

At this moment the surgeon came round, and I had no more opportunity of conversing with my neighbour that day. When night came he was delirious, and until I fell asleep it was pitiful to hear his wanderings; how he went back to the days of his early youth, when he was an innocent child, his reminiscences being ever and anon mingled with outbursts of lamentation and bitter self-reproach.

When I awoke the next day the nurse was standing by his side. "Poor fellow!" she said, turning to me, "he is very bad though he will not allow it himself. The doctor says he would certainly have recovered even if the injury were worse than it is, were it not that his constitution is ruined through habitual intemperance and the wild life he has led of late years. His blood is in a bad state, and he may sink rapidly; he ought to be warned of his danger."

I asked if I might be allowed to speak to him, and, since he was a Catholic, ascertain whether

he was desirous to see a priest. Consent was readily given, and I moved at once to his bedside, conscious that there was no time to be lost. The fit of fever had passed away, and he lay back on his pillow in a state of exhaustion. I endeavoured gently to acquaint him with his perilous condition, and urged him to accept the ministrations of a priest. But he would not believe my statement or accede to my proposal. "Not yet," he murmured. "When I am better, perhaps. I shall soon recover. I cannot, I will not die!"

Finding I could prevail nothing, I changed my tactics. "I know who you are," I said. "Your name is not Albert Davis; it is Alfonso Del Mar."

The sick man stared wildly at me. "Who are you," he asked, "and what do you know about me?"

"Not only do I know your real name," I continued, "but I know that you have on your conscience a terrible crime, which makes you afraid to die, afraid to appear before the tribunal of God."

Del Mar's countenance became ghastly. "Hush, hush!" he cried. "Do not say that; it is false, it is false!"

"Is it false," I pursued, "that you were affianced to Marian Rutherford, that you quarrelled with her at Darnesfield Court, and that one evening you stabbed her to the heart?"

This was a bold venture on my part, and I

was almost appalled at the effect it produced. There was a gurgle in the man's throat as he vainly strove to articulate; cold drops stood on his brow, his lips writhed as in bodily torture, he grasped my wrist with his burning hand.

"Did she die," he exclaimed—"oh! tell me, did she die? Was that accursed blow fatal?" And when he read the answer on my countenance, "Alas! then I am a murderer," he ejaculated. "Dios mio, I am a murderer. Ay di mi, ay di mi!"

He lay back upon his pillow, moaning feebly, and I was obliged to call for assistance, as I perceived that the violence of his emotion had caused his wound to bleed afresh. The doctor insisted on quiet, but after a time the sick man's eye sought mine, and with an imperious gesture he summoned me to his side.

"My sin has found me out at last," he said. "I thought no human eye witnessed it; sometimes I have even persuaded myself that the whole was a hideous dream. Ever since that fatal night a curse has pursued me. I have failed in everything. I have been a wanderer and an outcast. I have plunged into wild excitement in order to escape from the remembrance which haunted me. I have endeavoured to drown my remorse with intoxicating drink. But tell me, if you saw it, why did you not deliver me up to justice? Why did you not let them hang me as a murderer? How much it would have spared me! If you only knew

what these years have been! And now the end has come, and it is too late for hope, too late for repentance, too late for forgiveness!"

I said all I could to soothe the sufferer; I reminded him of the infinite mercy of God, of the Sacrament of Penance open to sinners, of the welcome the Church prepares for the penitent prodigal. And then I left him, that I might seek the priest and ask him to be in readiness should Del Mar consent to see him. He promised to come to the ward that same evening, and fervently did I pray that he might not come in vain, as far as my poor friend was concerned.

Through the mercy of Heaven the good priest's persuasions were effectual. The next morning Del Mar, who, though for long years he had neglected to approach the Sacraments, had never denied the Faith, was reconciled to the Church, and made his peace with God, promising that if spared to recover he would lead a life of penance and atonement for his sin. But this was not to be; although at first he seemed to have passed safely over the worst crisis, and was even pronounced out of danger, yet blood-poisoning set in and he sank rapidly. I saw him again two or three times before his death, but I never disclosed to him the manner in which I had become possessed of his secret and made aware of the crime long before the thought of it had taken shape in his brain. Nor did he question me much on the subject: he evidently took it for granted that I had somehow been an unobserved spectator of

the terrible scene, and had concealed the fact from motives of prudence—from inability to trace the culprit, perhaps, or from lack of sufficient evidence to convict him, or more likely still, from fear of attracting to myself suspicion of guilt which it would be difficult, nay, impossible, to disprove. At any rate, he doubtless concluded that I had had good reasons of my own for not appearing in the matter and revealing what had occurred in those brief moments of frenzied passion—moments which he was to expiate by years of bitter remorse.

I told him Miss Rutherford was supposed to have committed suicide, but I naturally forbore from interrogating him as to the circumstances which led to the crime, though I was curious to know its immediate motive. On this point, however, during our last interview, he voluntarily enlightened me.

"Though all was broken off between Miss Rutherford and myself," he said, "and I was on the eve of sailing for America, some evil impulse impelled me, before I should leave England for ever, once more to revisit the place where I had first become acquainted with her. I believe my good angel tried to deter me, for innumerable obstacles opposed themselves to the execution of my project, but each one only made me more determined to realize it. Mr. Moreland had left Darnesfield Court, but I was well acquainted with the Somersets, to whom, as you doubtless know, the mansion belonged, and who were

again occupying it. To their house I went, ostensibly for the purpose of paying them a parting visit, but really to see Marian once more. I found that she had recently become engaged to Henry Somerset. I saw her walking with him in the grounds, as she had formerly walked with me; and, my jealous temperament leading me to imagine that perference for him had caused her to reject me, I resolved to reproach her with her perfidy. In vain I watched for an opportunity of speaking to her alone, but when the time to take leave arrived I contrived, under some pretext or other, to draw her aside for a moment, and beg her, for the sake of the love she once bore me, to grant me an interview that evening after the household had retired, as I wished the fact of our meeting to be a secret. Bewildered and astonished, she had not time to collect her thoughts, and before she was aware of what she was doing she had given her consent. She let me in at the front door, which was, as I had foreseen, left unbolted that night for the convenience of the son of the house, who had gone to a ball in the neighbourhood. I reproached her, as I had intended; she was a very high-spirited girl, and, irritated by my injustice, retorted in a manner which stung me to madness, and, my hot blood getting the better of me, I lost every vestige of self-control. Terrified at my vehemence and at the menaces I uttered, she fled from me into the library—and you know the rest. Instead of leaving for South America in the

steamer in which I had taken my passage, I let it start without me and embarked under a false name for Australia on the next vessel which happened to be sailing. But for the knowledge I so unexpectedly found you to possess of a crime I deemed known only to God and to myself, I should never have summoned up courage to see a priest, and my miserable life would in all probability have been terminated by a yet more miserable death."

On the following day, Del Mar received the Last Sacraments, and expired some hours later in excellent dispositions, having repeatedly made acts of humble contrition and complete resignation to the will of God. The last words he was heard to utter were, "Jesus, pardon! Mary, help!" And may we not feel assured that when he passed into the presence of his Judge the sentence pronounced on him was a merciful one?

I saw him laid in his lonely grave, and as I turned away from the cemetery I no longer asked myself for what end I had beheld the mysterious apparition. No longer did I exclaim, *Cui bono?* for I had found the key to the enigma, and my oft-repeated question was *answered at last.*

# A Story of the Great Plague.

## I.

NO one who saw Christopher Hartley as he walked along the narrow street which led away from his home in London, one warm September morning in the year of grace 1665, could fail to notice his manly and striking appearance. He was tall and well-made, with bright blue eyes and curly brown hair, and although simply attired in an ordinary suit of dark brown cloth, with one of the low-crowned, broad-brimmed hats which had superseded the high head-gear worn in the preceding reign, there was an unmistakable air of distinction about his air and deportment. But an expression of deep sadness rested upon his handsome features, an expression which seemed somewhat out of keeping with his youthful appearance and gallant bearing, though the circumstances by which he was surrounded were indeed sufficient to account for it.

At the period of which we are speaking, the Great Plague of London was at its height; and although a large proportion of the wealthier inhabitants of the stricken city had fled into the country, thus greatly diminishing the population, in one month alone no less than thirty-one

thousand persons had succumbed to the pestilence.

It was not, however, the presence of death in the city under so terrible a form, nor the great mortality he beheld on every side, that imparted the settled air of melancholy to the young man's countenance. He was only twenty-five years old, but he had more sorrows and keener ones than usually fell to the share of men of his age. His family had never swerved from their allegiance to the faith of their forefathers during the evil days that had prevailed for the last hundred years; and since the enactment of penal laws against Catholics in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, they had paid a heavy penalty for their fidelity. Christopher's father had not, it is true, been a martyr in the strict sense of the word, but he had forfeited his estate and also his life on account of his unswerving adherence to the Catholic Church. He had died in prison, a few years before my story opens, in consequence of the hardships and miseries to which he had been subjected during a protracted period of incarceration. The confinement alone would have sufficed to break down his constitution, if not to end his days, accustomed as he had always been to an active, out-door life in the fresh, invigorating air of the mountains of Wales, in one of the most picturesque parts of which Penlyn Court, the estate that had belonged to his ancestors for many generations, was situated.

The individual mainly instrumental in bring-

ing these misfortunes on Christopher's family, was one William Featherstone, who had formerly acted as Mr. Hartley's steward, but had been dismissed from his service on suspicion of having embezzled money belonging to his master. This man had subsequently apostatized, and revenged himself on Mr. Hartley for his dismissal by informing against him as one who had harboured priests, and, in defiance of the law, had had Mass said in his house. Having succeeded well in this first act of villainy, he had proceeded to lodge accusations against other persons, finally receiving, as the reward of his treachery, the estate of the Hartleys, which had been confiscated to the crown. Thus he returned to Penlyn Court to reign as master, where, in years gone by, he held the position of a servant.

At the moment of which we speak, however, Featherstone was in London, for so cordial was the hatred entertained for him by all the peasantry around Penlyn, who contrasted his stern sway with the gentle rule of the former lords of the manor, and so universal was the indignation excited by his proposal to demolish the ancient chapel where for centuries they had assisted at the Holy Sacrifice, that he deemed it prudent to leave the neighbourhood for a while. He therefore journeyed up to town in the spring of 1665, just before the outbreak of the plague; nor when death was busy within its walls, did he hasten to escape the danger. He postponed his departure until the vast tide of emigration,

which at first flowed from every outlet into the country, was stopped by the Lord Mayor refusing to grant certificates of health to the outgoers; for the neighbouring townships, rising in their own defence to prevent the spread of the infection, had formed a barrier round the devoted city. He consequently found himself compelled to remain there all through that dreadful summer, although the house which he occupied was situated at no great distance from the residence of the son of his former master, whom he had so cruelly wronged. The injurer and the injured were alike unaware of each other's presence in London and little suspected the close proximity into which a strange chance had brought them.

Christopher was one of the few members of the upper classes who had not abandoned their homes on the first alarm. With his only sister Alice, and the faithful servant, their nurse in former days, who now asked for nothing but permission to share their fallen fortunes, he had preferred to remain, trusting in the protection of Providence, and waiting until the epidemic should be over. Like many of the burghers, he laid in as large a store of provisions as was possible, as if preparing for a siege; giving strict orders that no one should leave the house without necessity, or go to the market, by frequenting which infection might be brought to the household.

But on the morning in question, what formed the subject of Christopher's musings? Was

he thinking of his boyhood's home, now lost to him for ever? Of his heroic father, who rejoiced to suffer and die for the truth? Of his pious and tender-hearted mother, who, unable to bear up against her overwhelming sorrows, had mercifully been permitted to rejoin her husband in their eternal home? Or were his sad thoughts —for as I have said, a glance sufficed to show that his thoughts were sad—awakened by the scenes through which he was passing? These were, it is true, gloomy enough, in spite of the autumnal sunshine flooding the city and lighting up with its soft radiance the forlorn and deserted streets, grass-grown in many places for lack of footsteps to tread them. Business was everywhere suspended, shops shut, and whole rows of houses boarded up and forsaken, whilst others bore upon their closed doors the fatal red cross with the dread inscription: *Lord, have mercy on us!* which indicated the presence of the plague within. An oppressive silence brooded in the air, broken only from time to time by groans and lamentations, shrieks of agony, cries of despair, or the deep-toned utterance of men who walked up and down through the city, exclaiming in pathetic accents: *Spare, O Lord, spare Thy people whom Thou hast redeemed with Thy precious Blood!*

These sights and sounds failed, however, to produce any powerful impression upon Christopher, for his thoughts were absorbed by anxious fears respecting Sir Antony Mason, a valued friend of

his family, and a Catholic who, like his own father, had parted with lands and possessions rather than relinquish the priceless pearl of his hereditary faith. Sir Antony had fallen sick of the plague two days before, and so rapid and so fatal was for the most part the progress of the disease, that the chances were that he was now no longer amongst the living. Christopher was desirous to arrive at some certainty as to his fate, in order that, if his worst fears were realised, he might at least endeavour to see that his friend's remains were consigned to the common grave, which awaited all the victims of the epidemic, with some show, if not of due respect, at any rate of ordinary decency. With this view he directed his steps towards the house of Dr. Heath, a member of the College of Physicians, and one of those appointed to attend the sick, hoping to gain from him the desired information.

Christopher had not proceeded far on his way when he caught sight of the very person of whom he was in quest, walking in advance of him. Quickening his pace, he soon overtook and accosted him; after the usual greetings were exchanged, the doctor invited Christopher to accompany him as far as Lombard Street, whither he was going in order to purchase the drugs he required. The young man gladly assented, and, linking his arm in that of his friend, told him why he had come to seek him.

"Sir Antony died only a few hours ago," replied the physician; "as soon as I saw him

his morning I knew there was no hope, for the fatal *tokens*, or spots which are the sure forerunners of death, had appeared on his breast; he expired half-an-hour afterwards. God rest his soul!"

On hearing this, Christopher's eyes filled with tears. "Ah me!" he exclaimed, "I have indeed lost a true friend! Alas! that there should have been no priest at hand to speed his parting soul! That he, a faithful son of Holy Church, should have left this world without the consolations of religion, without the sacred Viaticum to support him on his last journey! O why is our faith thus proscribed, why are our ministers hunted down and banished from the land!"

"I did what I could for him," continued the physician. "Bidding the nurse leave the room on some pretext, I held to his lips the crucifix I carry concealed in the false bottom of a snuff-box, and whispered in his ear an act of contrition. This seemed to soothe him, and, between the paroxysms of his agony, I caught the murmured words: Jesus, mercy! Mary, help! His daughter, poor child, is in sad affliction. She will not be allowed to leave the house for forty days, the rule is a stringent one. I trust she may escape the contagion; every precaution is taken, rosin and incense are burnt continually in her room, and I have charged her to hold aloof from intercourse with any one from without. If she is attacked, there will be little hope for her; not one in five recovers, and women and children especially fall an easy prey."

Christopher's cheek had flushed at the mention of the Baronet's daughter. "What a cruel, shameful regulation that is," he cried, "shutting up infected houses, and thus enclosing healthy persons alive in the tomb!"

His companion noticed his heightened colour, and looked at him with a peculiar smile. "It is doubtful," he rejoined, "whether the practice of shutting up houses, where a case of plague has occurred, does much towards arresting the progress of the scourge. Certainly infected persons are thereby prevented from going about the streets and communicating the disease to others, but, on the other hand, it may be urged that sequestering the sound with the sick seems almost equivalent to passing a sentence of death on them. What with the alarm and depression they feel, and the want of air and exercise, they are predisposed to take the contagion, and readily succumb to the pestilence. Last week I was called in by a family who, on the Monday, were all apparently well; on Saturday at noon, not one was left; master, mistress, five children and four servants, all were dead; and this is but one instance amongst many. You cannot think what ingenious stratagems people resort to in order to elude the vigilance of the watchman who guards the house, and escape by some window or back door. Sometimes even the nurses will bribe him to connive at their departure, and the dying will be left to expire helpless and alone."

"It is a singular thing," remarked Christopher,

"that danger of death should develop heroic self-devotion in some characters, and pusillanimous selfishness in others. I suppose a panic seizes on people at times, and they are really not accountable for what they are doing."

"In many cases," replied the physician, "it is the commencement of the frenzy which is one of the worst symptoms of this malignant disease. When the fictitious strength of delirium subsides, we know the end is near. Look," he added, pointing to a man somewhat in advance of them, "at that poor fellow, staggering along as if he were intoxicated! he is doomed; in a short time he will drop down dead." Then observing a change pass over his companion's countenance, "Come," he said, "we had better go another way, you must keep your distance of him. I see you have the prudence to carry a bunch of rue in your bosom; it is a good preservative, but you might with advantage hold a little myrrh in your mouth or smoke a pipe of tobacco."

It was but seldom that distressing sights met the eye of the passing stranger, for by the exertions of the magistrates the streets of London were, in the daytime at least, kept fairly clear of the dead and dying. Sometimes indeed persons might be seen lying in a comatose state by the roadside, never more to awaken until they hear the last trumpet; or the sick, driven crazy by the intense pain of the swellings caused by the disease, would escape from their nurses, throw themselves from the window, and run half-clothed

about the streets, endeavouring to destroy themselves. Too often they succeeded in doing so, since no one dared to approach or interfere with them.

The friends now entered what was once a crowded thoroughfare. "What a dismal solitude surrounds us!" exclaimed Dr. Heath, "it is like a Puritan sabbath kept with unusual solemnity. In that house all are dead; the door stands open, as you see, yet no one ventures in. An unlucky thief the other day entered a deserted dwelling for the purpose of stealing: he paid dearly for the pelf, for the same night he was carried to the churchyard. The churches, on the other hand, are mostly closed; the ministers of the Establishment were amongst the first to quit the city with their richer parishioners, leaving the poorer part of their flock without aid or counsel in the time of direst need."

"Possibly," remarked Christopher, "they thought the voice of God was so plainly audible speaking to the city, that their preaching was no longer needed. The unlicensed preachers, however, who were banished, seem to have returned and have possessed themselves of the vacant pulpits. I am told they draw together a vast concourse of people, who listen to their exhortations as if each sermon were their last."

"They do not come near the sick," rejoined the physician; "it is often very sad to hear poor dying creatures confessing aloud their sins, and calling in vain for a minister of religion to pray with and comfort them."

Here the conversation between the friends was abruptly concluded, for a lad ran up to Dr. Heath and begged him to come at once to his mother, who had fallen sick. He therefore bade Christopher good-bye, and the two went their several ways.

Christopher had carefully abstained from mentioning to Dr. Heath his intention of attending the burial of Sir Antony Mason, knowing that the good doctor would have spared no effort to dissuade him from executing his purpose, fraught, as it undoubtedly was, with no small amount of danger. Nor was he less reticent when he returned home, and in answer to the questions of his sister Alice, related to her the few particulars he had been able to glean in regard to the last hours of Sir Antony, whom they both dearly loved. He had been to them like a second father, and was closely associated with all their childish memories; Margaret, his only daughter, had been their constant play-fellow and companion, indeed the three had been inseparable during the greater part of their lives, and Christopher's brotherly affection for Margaret had ripened into a deeper and warmer feeling. Subsequently, Sir Antony had become so impoverished by the repeated fines he had been compelled to pay, as to be obliged to sell his estates, and take refuge with his daughter in London. It is no wonder therefore that Christopher and Alice felt the old man's death to be a real personal sorrow, and no wonder either, that they were full of solicitude on Margaret's account.

"If only I could go to her," Alice said, "and try to comfort her, or at least tell her how truly I share her grief!"

Christopher longed to say yes, but his affection for his sister and his sense of duty compelled him to reply: "No, Alice, that is not to be thought of. It would be impossible for you to gain admittance into the house, and even if you could do so, I would not hear of your incurring so great a risk of infection."

"Might I not at least write her a letter?" Alice resumed after a few moments, "it would be easy to find a messenger who would give it to the watchman."

"Yes, there would be no difficulty in that," replied Christopher; "now that everybody is out of employment, there are plenty who would be glad to go an errand for the smallest gratuity. Write your note at once, and I will see that it gets to its destination."

Alice turned immediately to her desk, but some time elapsed before the epistle was ready. The young ladies of King Charles the Second's reign, though they were quite as constantly and as usefully employed as their representatives in the present day, found the handling of the pen a far more laborious task; thus by the time that the letter was written, signed, folded, sealed and superscribed, the evening was somewhat far advanced.

After the little household had, according to their usual custom, recited the Rosary together,

Christopher turned to Catherine, the attached dependent of whom mention has been made, and desired her not to sit up for him, as he was going out on an errand which might detain him till a late hour, possibly even until the next morning. Alice looked wistfully at him, but she possessed too much tact to hazard indiscreet questions, so she merely wished him good-night as usual; but she sighed when she heard the door close behind him, and knew he had sallied forth on his solitary way. "May the Mother of God and the holy angels protect him," she murmured; "alas, who is safe in these terrible days!"

Meanwhile Christopher turned his steps in the direction of Aldgate Churchyard, the nearest burying-ground, and therefore the one to which the remains of his friend were sure to be taken for interment, when, after nightfall, the cart in which the bodies of the dead were collected went its round. It was there that a vast pit, forty feet long and sixteen broad, had been made to receive the victims of the plague; it had been dug to the depth of twenty feet, and was already half full, more than six hundred corpses having been deposited in it. Strict orders had been issued, prohibiting the admission of strangers to the place of burial, for it was no uncommon thing for persons, either desperate or delirious, distraught with excessive grief or deranged by excruciating pain, to rush in and cast themselves alive into the pit prepared for the last resting-place of the dead. Thus, although Christopher

was acquainted with the sexton in charge of the churchyard, he found it a matter of no small difficulty to gain access to it; the man earnestly dissuaded him from entering, telling him that those whose business and duty it was must incur the risk, but curiosity—which he supposed to be his motive—did not justify him in exposing himself to it. "You will see a terrible sight, too," he added; "the buriers themselves, the most hardened wretches in the town, are sometimes beaten back. They die by scores, even those who have already had the plague have been known to take it again, and succumb to a second attack. In fact, did not dire necessity compel them, none would be found to undertake the loathsome office." Then seeing Christopher was not to be deterred, "Well then, in the name of God, if you will venture! go in, young man," he said; "it will be a sermon to you—the best perhaps you ever heard in your life."

One instant our hero's resolution wavered, but at that moment two torch-bearers approached, followed by the bell-man who preceded the cart with its ghastly load, and Christopher entered without further delay. When they reached the side of the pit, a gentleman appeared, muffled in a cloak, who had slipt in unperceived, and now stood by the cart in an agony of grief: it contained all he loved on earth, his wife and four fair children. The buriers were inclined to handle him roughly, but on his putting some silver into their hands, they allowed him to remain. When, how-

ever, the unfortunate man saw the uncoffined bodies tossed promiscuously, as the wont was, into the yawning pit, to the number of twenty or thirty, some shrouded in winding-sheets, others merely wrapped in rugs, which, slipping off as they fell, disclosed to view the livid and discoloured corpses they were intended to conceal, the horror of the scene was too much for him, and he fainted. Christopher too felt sick at heart; his errand of mercy was fruitless, for, in the dim light of the lanterns containing candles, which, placed on the heaps of earth surrounding the pit, alone illumined the scene, it was impossible to distinguish one body from another before it was huddled, so to speak, into the common grave. No distinction was made between rich and poor, Catholic or Protestant; and no sooner was the cart emptied, than the buriers began shovelling in a slight covering of earth, before a fresh load should in its turn arrive. Christopher had no wish to witness a repetition of the sickening sight, so he turned away, and with a prayer for the soul of his departed friend, left the churchyard.

On his way he passed close to the tavern whither the bereaved gentleman who had swooned had been carried. He was about to enter and ask if he could be of service to him, when the sound of loud laughter and profane oaths arrested him on the threshold. This tavern was the nightly resort of a company of revellers who were accustomed, with reckless disregard of

the awful scourge, to bid defiance to the King of Terrors, and greet the passing dead-cart with ribald jest. They were now mocking the grief of the unhappy mourner, taunting him with lack of courage for not jumping into the pit in order to go to heaven, as they expressed it, with the rest of his family; asking him, with profane jeers, what he did out of the grave whither all were hastening? As Christopher listened, he felt his blood boil with indignation; he longed to go in and boldly rebuke these abandoned men, who could witness unmoved the terrible judgments of God, but he checked the impulse and passed on, deeming it better to leave Providence to vindicate its own cause.* O Christopher, it was easy enough in this instance to leave vengeance to God, but difficult indeed will you find it to practise the needful self-control when the moment of fierce temptation comes, and the matter in question closely concerns yourself! Little do you imagine, as you go on your way, how soon and in how unforeseen a manner that temptation will assail you!

* This incident is historical. Every one of those jesters was, within the space of a few days, attacked by the plague, and carried to the selfsame grave.

## II.

It was now almost one o'clock, and the moon, which was nearly full, stood high in the cloudless heaven. Christopher turned into one of the narrow alleys which abounded in London previous to the great fire, where the upper stories of the houses on either side of the way nearly touched, so that but few straggling moonbeams fell across the rough, uneven pavement. Not a sound broke the stillness, except the distant bell of the dead-cart on its rounds, or the creaking of the heavy sign-boards, which, suspended over the doors of the deserted tenements, swung slowly to and fro in the night breeze. Nor was any creature visible, unless a stray cat darted across the street, a solitary survivor of its race; for such was the terror of the infection, that all dogs and cats had been slaughtered, lest they should be a means of spreading it.

As Christopher emerged from the narrow street the sound of voices struck his ear: from the window of one of the larger dwellings, on whose portal the fatal cross was visible, a woman, apparently a nurse, was calling to the watchman, who, halbert in hand, was pacing up and down below. "You may stop the cart when it comes near," she was saying, "my master is just dead; there is no one else here, so I am going away, come and help me."

The man entered the house, but only to re-

appear in a moment, accompanied by the nurse. They were dragging, with scant ceremony, the body of a man, which they laid on a bench by the door; a whispered colloquy then ensued, after which the nurse re-entered the house. Concealed by the deep shadow of the buildings, Christopher waited to see what would happen next. He could not help remembering how he had heard that hired nurses not unfrequently forsook the sick whom they were attending, ere they were actually dead, in order to enrich themselves by plunder before giving notice of the decease to the officer appointed to certify the death. His idea that the nurse might in this instance have proved unfaithful to her trust was confirmed by seeing her re-issue from the house and hurry away, bearing with her a large and apparently heavy bundle. As he gazed after her retreating figure, a sudden impulse prompted him to cross the street and look at the prostrate form where it lay swathed in a sheet and covered from head to foot, its ghastly outlines standing out distinct in the bright moonlight. As he contemplated it, a moan, so faint as to be well-nigh inaudible, fell upon his ear. He listened, and the sound was repeated, this time more distinctly, and he thought—or fancied—that he detected the slightest possible movement in the folds of the linen shroud.

"Can it be that the man is not really dead?" Christopher said to himself, "and in that case can I go on my way and leave him to be flung,

with perchance the life yet in him, into the horrible pit by the side of which I have just been standing?"

He was a warm-hearted, as well as a courageous man; without pausing to reflect further, he stooped down, uncovered the face of the supposed corpse, and found himself brought face to face with the strongest temptation he had ever known in the course of his five and twenty years of life. For when he turned back the shroud, the face upon which he looked was none other than that of William Featherstone, his father's former steward, his own worst enemy.

Had Christopher detested him less he would scarcely have recognised the once familiar features in the livid, disfigured lineaments of the wretched being before him. But the instinct of hatred is as unerring as that of love, and his recognition of the ci-devant steward was the work of a single instant. Madly his blood coursed through his veins; his heart gave one great throb of exultant satisfaction, and all the hatred which for years he had struggled to repress, rushed back upon him with almost overwhelming force. It is not in human nature to behold unmoved the prosperity of the wicked. especially when this prosperity has been effected at the cost of one's own ruin. A feeling however, which in itself is not blameworthy, had, in Christopher's case, developed into a bitter hatred, and eager thirst for revenge. Not that he so far forgot his duty as a Christian as to indulge these evil pas-

sions; on the contrary, he struggled against them with all his might. Over and over again he hoped he had forgiven this man; nay more, he *had*, in reality, forgiven him; but now the fire he fondly imagined himself to have trodden out and extinguished for ever, suddenly flared up, and flamed more fiercely than before

"Here is your revenge!" whispered the tempter in his ear; "pass on, and leave this man to the fate he so richly deserves. God's vengeance has overtaken him, would you seek to arrest the hand of the Almighty? He is doomed to death, let him die; after all, it is a merciful fate for one who merits the gallows. Faugh! leave the plague-stricken wretch alone; why seek to prolong even for an hour the life of such a reprobate as he? Will you take him back into his house, tend and cherish him at the risk of your own life? He may be already too far gone to revive; he will certainly never return to consciousness if he is thrown into the cart and thence transferred to the pit. Had he pity on your father, rotting in the Tower? On your mother, beggared and bereaved? On your sister and yourself, orphaned and outcast?"

What is greater than the misery of hesitation, especially when two opposing feelings, the evil and the good, the angel and the demon, struggle within us for the mastery? In the present instance the struggle was of brief duration; already the bell was heard, already the cart was seen, the rumble of its heavy wheels recalling the

necessity for swift decision and prompt action. Christopher had not been taught in the school of the Saints for nothing; not in vain had he been trained to resist and stifle the impulses of his rebel nature; the words *Vengeance belongeth to Me, and I will repay, saith the Lord,** flashed into his mind. Instantly he stooped over the prostrate form, and, lifting it in his powerful arms, bore it back into the plague-infected dwelling; he laid it on the bed, and once more unwrapped the sheet; there was no mistake, it was indeed his enemy, the deadly enemy of his house, of his faith, of his God. Tenderly and carefully did he cherish the poor, weak fluttering spark of life, and fan it back into a flame; then as soon as the patient could be left, he hastened in the light of the early morning to Dr Heath's residence, in order to beg him in the first place to tell him of some trustworthy nurse, and in the second, to go and acquaint Alice with his whereabouts, and the reason why he could not return home at present.

It was a small and unpretending house at the door of which the good doctor accordingly knocked about nine o'clock. His summons was soon answered by Catherine, who greeted him with a woe-begone countenance, exclaiming, as she invited him to enter, "O sir, what has become of my young master? He has not been home all night!"

Reassuring the faithful servant as to Chris-

* Hebrews x., 30.

topher's safety, Dr. Heath passed on into the little morning room. It was empty, but through the glass doors, which led into the garden, he could perceive the person of whom he was in search, and, desirous though he was to relieve her anxiety as soon as possible, he could not help pausing for a moment, in order to contemplate the picture which met his eye.

It was one of those days in autumn when the light seems to lend fresh beauty to the scenes it shines on, the air was soft and warm, a faint breeze stirred among the trees, causing a leaf here and there to float gently to the ground, and diffusing abroad the delicious odours of the flowers which were blossoming on all sides. The cultivation of her garden had been no small solace to Alice Hartley since she had been compelled to leave her country home and make her abode in London, and amply was she repaid for her exertions. The beds were ablaze with brilliance and beauty; stately hollyhocks and purple monkshood, golden marigolds and lilac lavender, tall sweetpeas and crimson asters, late flowering roses and starry jessamine, blended in one harmonious whole. In the centre of the little domain its mistress was seated on a low garden-chair beneath the shade of a spreading sycamore; she was bending assiduously over an embroidery frame, for she never could be idle, and her clever fingers had of late contributed to the maintenance of the little household.

The sound of Dr. Heath's footstep on the gravel path made her look round; she started, threw aside her work, and came eagerly forward to meet him. She was a very pretty girl, strikingly like her brother, yet with a perfectly soft and feminine cast of face. She had the same blue eyes, and her glossy, light-brown ringlets fell in graceful profusion on the transparent lawn collar, edged with lace, which was universally worn at that time. Her gown of lilac taffety was looped up with bows of ribbon over a petticoat of a darker shade; shoes with high heals and pointed toes completed her attire, which after all, was not so very dissimilar from that in vogue amongst us in the present day.

"Have you come to bring me news of Christopher, Dr. Heath?" she asked, as soon as she got up to him. But before he could answer her, his explanations were arrested upon his lips, for from behind a group of evergreen on the left, the figure of Margaret, Sir Antony Mason's daughter, came suddenly into view. Pale and sad as she looked, her heavy black gown clinging to her graceful figure, she was yet a sight to rivet the gaze of any man, though no one who saw her on that morning could have any idea of what she was when the brilliant colour came and went on her cheek, and her large dark eyes flashed with mirth and animation. Less strictly beautiful than Alice, her beauty was far more effective, partly because she was herself so much more fully conscious of it. With women she was

not a general favourite, but men could never resist her influence when she chose to exert it. One glance at Dr. Heath's astonished and displeased countenance, told her that this was an occasion which would test her powers to the uttermost.

"Margaret," he exclaimed, "what means, this? You ought not to be here." Margaret came close up, and laid both hands caressingly on his arm. "Do not be angry with me, Doctor," she pleaded; "indeed, indeed, I never intended to come in. It was so terrible there after they fetched my poor father away, that I felt I must just see Alice and Christopher again, but only through the window; I did not mean to cross the threshold."

Here Alice interposed. "The fault is mine," she said; "last night while I was looking out into the quiet moon-lit street, I heard some one sobbing—it was Margaret; how could I help bringing her in and comforting her? Every precaution you told us of has been taken; she has changed all her clothes, and carries about with her a plentiful supply of aromatic herbs."

Dr. Heath shook his head. He could not find it in his heart to reprove the fatherless girl standing before him, her sweet, sad eyes fixed on his with a pathetic expression. Gently touching her tear-stained cheek, "You should not have come without permission, my child," he said; "the rules must be kept. But how did you contrive to leave the house unobserved?"

The colour mounted to Margaret's face. "I gave the watchman a crown piece," she replied, "knowing that he would ere long betake himself to a neighbouring tavern. He locked the door and carried away the key in his pocket, but that did not matter. With the maid's help I took the screws out of the lock, and the door came open quite easily. But you have not yet told us where Christopher is?"

Then Dr. Heath sat down on the low garden-seat and commenced his tale. Alice listened in silence, without once averting her eyes from his face, while the hot tears ran down her cheeks; tears of joy and pride in her brother's heroism, tears of anxiety and fear lest this generous deed should cost him his life. Margaret, on the contrary, could hardly keep her indignation within bounds.

"Good heavens!" she cried at length, "how could he touch that accursed being! How can he stay by the side of that thief, that murderer, that persecutor of all that is good! To think that he is actually with him now, the brave, the beautiful Christopher, breathing the same atmosphere, an atmosphere polluted by the foulness of his loathsome sores, no less than by the still fouler exhalation of his most loathsome soul!"

"O Margaret!" exclaimed Alice, "what Christopher did was quite right!"

"Right?" continued the impetuous girl, "is it right to stay Heaven's vengeance on a vile wretch of whom the world was well rid? Is it right to

expose himself to almost certain death, to not a life so valuable, so all-important to you—to me? Will you speak with this calm approval, Alice, when your only brother pays the penalty of his rash generosity, and you are left, as I now am, to mourn the severance of the last tie that binds one to earth?"

"My dear child," interposed the physican authoritatively, "you must not speak thus. Christopher's act was one of heroic virtue, and his reward will be great in heaven. Confide your anxieties to God and His Blessed Mother; we hope and trust that Christopher will not take the plague, though I admit it will be almost a miracle if he does not. I shall watch him narrowly, and you may rest assured that no care shall be wanting to him should he fall sick."

"And that wretch will revive and recover, and live long to enjoy his ill-gotten wealth," Margaret went on. "Alas! what is so exasperating as the sight of the prosperity of the wicked! And we are required to acquiesce in it, nay more, to further it at the cost of all that is most dear and precious!"

"Thou art just, O Lord, and all Thy judgments are just," remarked the doctor. "Remember we see but a short space, God's judgments are often slow, but they are sure. Console yourself"—he turned to Margaret with a smile—"they may overtake the sinner sooner than you imagine; at any rate, unless he repents, his end will be utter destruction. Pray for him, that is the

best means of allaying the just resentment you feel."

He tnen gave Alice a few simple directions as to what antidotes must be employed should the fatal disease make its appearance in her household. She listened attentively, and asked some questions as to the symptoms of the plague in its first stages. "They vary somewhat in different individuals," answered the Doctor; "but in general, violent shivering which sometimes lasts four or five hours, accompanied with sickness and acute headache are its immediate precursors. I will tell you what is the worst danger to be dreaded: it is when a man has the plague, and is not aware of it. I have known cases when an individual has gone about, feeling slightly indisposed perhaps, but nothing more, for a week or even for a fortnight, a centre of infection to others, a walking destroyer, unconsciously breathing death on the very persons he would have given his life to save. Under these circumstances medical skill cannot distinguish the healthy from the sick; the taint does not show itself until the inward gangrene affects some vital part, and death ensues in a few hours."

The girls shuddered, and Margaret crossed herself. "Such cases are not very common," Dr. Heath added; "keep up your courage, my children. And now farewell. I have already tarried with you too long."

## III.

To find a more complete picture of tempora prosperity than that presented by William Featherstone as he rode slowly out of London on his homeward journey, one cool pleasant morning towards the end of October, would be a difficult, not to say an impossible task.

Money was evidently not lacking to him, and a mere casual glance was sufficient to show that amid all the varied misery and suffering which that memorable summer had brought in its train, his resources had been in no wise crippled or his means impoverished. Upon his head was one of the beaver hats then just coming into fashion, looped up with a jewel, and adorned with a feather. Beneath this hat an enormous periwig fell over his shoulders, almost hiding his collar of costly Brussels lace, yet not in any degree softening or improving the repulsive expression of his ill-favoured countenance. His riding-cloak was of dark green velvet, lined with crimson silk to correspond with the colour of the feather in his hat, its clasp and buttons being of silver filagree. Bows formed of the ribbon, much in favour at that time, fastened his short breeches at the knee, silk stockings, together with a pair of riding-boots, completing his travelling garb.

If it was thus apparent to every chance passer-by that Featherstone abounded in wealth, it

was no less plain that the state of his health left nothing to be desired. He had entirely recovered from the plague, and as he journeyed westwards, placing one mile after another between himself and the dreary city where he had so nearly found his grave, every new breath of the sweet perfumed air seemed to infuse fresh vigour into his frame, fresh life into his veins. He was experiencing that indescribable delight which all real lovers of the country feel when they leave the depressing streets and monotonous rows of houses behind them, and gaze once more on the peaceful smiling face of soothing sympathising nature.

Travelling by easy stages, resting whenever he was fatigued, he passed through classic Oxford, where King Charles still held his court, through tranquil Worcester with its hop-gardens, through smiling Hereford with its orchards and encircling hills. All without was sunshine and brightness, all within was satisfaction and content; not a single reproach of conscience disturbed his tranquillity. Far from being grateful for his rescue from death, or touched by the generous devotion of the man he had wronged, he considered the preservation of his life as a lucky accident, and never alluded to Christopher without a sneer of contempt. Nor did a single remorseful recollection of his past crimes arise to trouble him even when, drawing near to the home he had so wrongfully obtained for his own, he passed through the very scenes where those crimes had been committed.

Soon after leaving Monmouth, Featherstone traversed the village where lie interred the remains of Father Lambert, a holy priest whom he had denounced and hunted down a few years previously, and who subsequently suffered martyrdom. Another of his victims was a venerable ecclesiastic who had been in the habit of saying Mass at Penlyn Court from time to time while the Hartleys held possession of it. So strong was the attachment entertained for this good priest by the pious peasantry of the neighbourhood, that he might have escaped in time of persecution, had it not been for the ex-steward, who, discovering his retreat, gave notice of his presence to the authorities of the district. It was Featherstone's hand that fired the shot which proved fatal to the servant of God, and caused him to fall, bleeding and mortally wounded, on the stony bank of the stream he was just about to cross. The marks of the martyr's blood have never been effaced, even though after heavy rain the stream overflows its banks; indeed, the water sometimes covers the stones for several weeks together without rendering less distinct the crimson stains which may be clearly perceived up to the present day.

By the time that the closing day of our traveller's journey arrived, the weather, hitherto uniformly fine, had undergone a complete change. When, at the termination of his mid-day meal, he was preparing to depart, the landlord of the inn where he had halted hinted that it might

be advisable to wait until the morrow before attempting to proceed. "The weather may have cleared up a bit by then, sir," he said, "and, you see, the rain is not the worst part of the business. No doubt a rich gentleman like you can afford to spoil your fine cloak, but no one likes to risk his neck, and we have had such storms in these parts for the last week or more that the streams are all swollen; and there has been a landslip about three miles from Penlyn, which makes the road difficult to find."

"I thank you for your warning, good friend," Featherstone replied, with a careless laugh; "but it is not easy to frighten me. I seem to bear a charmed life, for the plague, which mowed down almost every one around me, spared me, though I had it so badly as only to escape by the skin of my teeth. I mean to get home to-night; I am not the man to be turned from my purpose by a few drops of rain."

With an obsequious bow the inn-keeper retired, and a few minutes later Featherstone had mounted his horse and was speeding on his way. Who can wonder if the language of his heart ran somewhat after this fashion—if he said to himself as many have said before him: *I have sinned, and what harm hath befallen me?* People too often have an aptitude for forgetting what it is inconvenient to remember, and Featherstone's memory probably failed to recall the latter half of the text with which our readers are doubtless familiar: *The Most High is a patient rewarder.*

As the brief October day drew to its close, a dense mist arose from the drenched earth, rendering yet thicker the darkness which had already set in, and making it difficult to see many yards ahead. Featherstone, whose jubilant mood had been gradually subsiding under the twofold influence of the continuous downpour and the sense of fatigue that was creeping over him, at length became aware that he had taken the wrong road. He alighted, slipped his horse's bridle over the branch of a tree, and endeavoured to discover where he was. Groping his way for some minutes over the sodden soil, the sound of rushing water caught his ear; growing more and more bewildered, he stumbled on until, all unaware of his danger, he reached the edge of a deep ravine.

Along the edge of this ravine there now runs a railway which carries the mineral treasures of Wales to London. Travellers by this line can look out of the carriage windows down the precipitous descent, and watch the now dwindled stream which flows at its foot. But in the days when the incidents recorded in this story happened, railroads had not even been thought of; where the firm embankment now is was a mass of tangled undergrowth mixed with loose pieces of rock, so that Featherstone had no sooner reached the brink of the declivity than he lost his foothold and fell, rolling over and over in his headlong course, bruising himself severely, yet all the while retaining sufficient presence of mind

to endeavour to arrest his fatal progress. He caught at the bushes on the bank; they stayed for a moment but could not prevent his fall: he clutched at the branch of a tree, but it swayed and snapt, incapable of sustaining his weight! Anon, with the energy of despair, he grasped a projecting stone, but it yielded beneath the pressure and, slipping from its place, descended with him, only serving to accelerate his downward course. Ere long he lay at the bottom of the precipice, battered, bruised, and bleeding; half-stunned with his fall, but still fully conscious of the fact that death was staring him in the face. He had rolled on to the bank of the stream, which, greatly swollen by the recent rains, was converted into a roaring torrent, ruthlessly rushing on its rapid way. Aloud he shrieked for help, but the noise of the water seemed to drown his frantic cries; only the echoes of the rocks took them up, and repeated them afar, as if delighting to deride his agony. He tried to rise, but his limbs would not sustain him; convulsively he dug his nails into the swampy grass for support, but he only felt the fibrous roots tear out of the earth, leaving him to slip further down the treacherous bank.

How terrible were the thoughts which at that moment crowded, fast and fearful, into the mind of the wretched man! As often happens in the case of dying persons, there passed before his mental vision, in swift and awful review, the

whole of his past life. He remembered the days of his childhood and early youth, the unheeded reproof, the ineffectual punishments he received from his parents and employers; he recollected how he had begun by taking small sums, and then, omitting to mention his faults in confession, had gone from bad to worse. And, most terrible of all, had he not apostatized from the Faith; had he not persecuted the Church of God; had he not denounced the servants of Christ? He knew that the very torrent which, in the course of a few brief seconds, must inevitably swallow him up, was the self-same stream by the side of which the martyred priest had fallen, and that the water which had never been able to wash out the stains of his victim's blood would soon hurry him to his doom. Well might he tremble, knowing what he had done, and knowing also what his deeds had deserved; knowing what he might have been, and knowing also what he was; knowing that the time of mercy was passing fast away, that soon it would be gone for ever, and the eternity of justice would have begun.

Writhing in anguish and despair, Featherstone sank still further, and fell into the surging, seething stream, which leaped and roared and foamed like some wild creature eager for its prey. Hurriedly it carried him onwards to the Usk, the Usk with its turbid waters swept him down to the Severn, and the Severn in its turn bore him swiftly to the ocean, to be no more beheld

by mortal eye, until the sea shall give up the dead that are in it.

Featherstone's horse got loose and gallopped home to Penlyn Court, thus warning the household there that some accident had happened to his master. It proved no difficult task to trace the prints of the animal's hoofs over the miry roads, back to the spot where it had been fastened up. Here Featherstone's footsteps could be distinctly followed to the verge of the ravine, where broken bushes, displaced bits of rock, and fragments of his dress revealed to the searchers the place where he had fallen. By pursuing a circuitous path at no great distance, they were enabled to reach the edge of the stream, where they found, on some stones a few feet from the brink, one of his gloves and portions of a lace cravat which, in his struggles, he had rent to pieces. These were the sole traces which could be found; but the tale of his dreadful end has never been forgotten. After the lapse of more than two centuries, the peasants who dwell upon those lonely mountain sides, and in the solitary valleys, still recount to the travellers every detail of the story, and assert that when the wild winds sigh and moan amid the lofty pines in the darkness of some stormy night, the voice of the unhappy apostate may be distinctly heard, bewailing his sad fate in thrilling accents of remorse and woe.

## IV.

The doctor's fears concerning Christopher were realized; he did not escape the infection, but in a few days fell sick of the plague. At this period the epidemic had not only greatly diminished, as far as the number of its victims was concerned, but had also assumed a less virulent form, so that his life was not placed in any serious danger. By the time that he had completely regained his health, and was allowed to return home, the disease had almost disappeared, and free communication was once more restored between the capital and the provinces. He felt the need of a thorough change of air, scene, and surroundings, for his sister and himself; and they both longed to be able, for a while at least, to practise their religion openly. Therefore they determined to accept the invitation of some connections of their mother, and pass the ensuing winter in Brittany; Margaret finding a home in the house of Dr. Heath, whose wife had offered to receive her. Before many months had elapsed, Alice Hartley became the wife of a pious nobleman, the Marquis de Kersabiec, who possessed a fine old chateau on the banks of the Rance.

After seeing her thus happily settled, Christopher returned to England, and, through the influence of a friend who occupied a high position at Court, was in course of time put in possession

of his family estates, which had lapsed to the Crown on the decease of William Featherstone without issue. As soon as all needful legal formalities regarding the restitution of Penlyn to its rightful owner had been satisfactorily arranged, Margaret Mason was brought home as a bride to the ancient mansion, to be the joy and delight of her husband's heart, the crown and pride of his long and prosperous life; for he lived to see, not only his children, but also his children's children, grow up and flourish around him.

Over and over again in the long winter evenings, when the ruddy glow of the piled-up logs blazing on the ample hearth gleamed and danced on the shining suits of armour, and ancestral portraits which adorned the walls of the spacious hall at Penlyn Court, he would relate to a youthful audience the tale of the Great Plague. Yet none of the children who hung breathless on the lips of the placid, white-haired old man, ever suspected that he had, in years long past, been himself the hero of the exciting adventures he recounted, though the older members of the group could not fail to observe how earnestly he warned them against giving way to revenge, and how constantly he reminded them that it is none other than God Himself Who has said, *Vengeance belongeth to Me, and I will repay.*




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